THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

“Currents of Hope”: Connecting the Socialist Literature of William Morris With the Radical Works of William Cobbett, Robert Owen and Ernest Jones

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PhD in English Literature

The University of Edinburgh

2020

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to articulate both the nature and the importance of the connection between the socialist writing of William Morris and the work of three specific figures associated with early-to-mid nineteenth-century radicalism: William Cobbett, Robert Owen and Ernest Jones. Critics have noted both the existence and the interest of each connection in a variety of cases, and some have even sought to explore one or more of them to a limited degree. Ultimately, however, any comprehensive and focussed enquiry into the form and meaning of Morris's relation to the figures specified above has yet to be undertaken. This is in spite of the fact that such an enquiry has positive ramifications for the study of Morris himself, as well as of the trajectory of nineteenth-century radical thought in a broader sense.

Cobbett, Owen and Jones all represent particular modes of political writing within an early nineteenth-century context which Morris, writing some five decades later, takes on and adapts in his own political work. The recognition of such continuities facilitates new perspectives on certain important themes in Morris's work, themes such as place and the political, radical conceptions of history, proletarian autonomy in the creation of utopia and the role of the poet within a working-class movement. In each of these cases, Morris exhibits the distinct and illuminating influence – whether conscious or unconscious – of either Cobbett, Owen or Jones, while at the same time differing from the example of the earlier radical writer in question in certain vital ways.

The identification of such connections between Morris and his radical predecessors not only allows a more comprehensive view of Morris, it also contributes towards a fuller understanding of the ways in which radical thought in the nineteenth century as a whole is subject to both continuity and change. As well as original analyses of Morris, this thesis contains new arguments about Cobbett, Owen and Jones, and in every chapter each earlier radical writer is considered at the same length and in the same depth as Morris. In

this way, this thesis attempts to map the fates of certain cultural and intellectual strands which begin with early nineteenth-century radicalism and continue into late nineteenth-century socialism.

Lay Summary

This thesis examines the ways in which the socialist literature of William Morris can be viewed as a continuation of, or as a response to, types of political thought and writing evident in the works of William Cobbett, Robert Owen and Ernest Jones, all of whom are associated with radical politics in the early-to-mid nineteenth century. Looking at Morris alongside Cobbett, I consider the role of place in politics for both figures, as well as the nature and purpose of their respective visions of the sixteenth century in the history of the development of capitalism. Reading Owen with Morris, I analyse the extent to which Owen's conception of the role of the working class in the creation of utopia is present in Morris's own vision of a revolutionary proletariat. Finally, examining Morris and Jones, I consider the role of the individual poet writing for and within a working-class mass-movement. By demonstrating the continuities between Morris and the above prominent figures of nineteenth-century radicalism, I intend to re-position Morris as a figure who is intimately connected with that tradition in a number of vital ways. Such a re-positioning will facilitate new perspectives on the work of Morris as well as on the works of Cobbett, Owen and Jones, ultimately allowing for a fuller picture of the nature of political writing and thought during the course of the nineteenth century.

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Introduction

In the opening paragraphs of William Morris's utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (1889) there is the following microcosmic depiction of the state of late nineteenth-century socialism in Britain: "Up at the League, says a friend, there had been one night a brisk conversational discussion … there were six persons present, and consequently six sections of the party were represented" (3). As well as being a satire of the state of the Socialist League during the late 1880s and early 1890s specifically, this sardonic portrait also hints at the fact that the early British socialist movement was very far from homogeneous in character, but represented, rather, the confluence of a number of different – and often conflicting – ideological streams: old Chartists or Owenites, land reformers (enthused by the works of Henry George and Alfred Russell Wallace), Marxists, anarchists, Fabians, trade unionists, Christian socialists and, from 1893, members of the fledgling Independent Labour Party.[1]

William Morris, like any other member of the early socialist movement in Britain, represents the coming-together of a particular set of the above elements. Both his contemporaries and later critics have debated at length the precise ratio of one element to another in the making of his political worldview – some have detected anarchist leanings in his political thought (MacCarthy 453-456), some have claimed to observe in him a kind of instinctively felt ethical socialism[2] and others, such as Paul Meier, insist that he adhered to an essentially orthodox form of Marxism.[3] At the same time, of course, Morris brought with him outside influences: not only those of John Ruskin and Victorian romanticism, but also the accumulated experiential and intellectual

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[1] For a comprehensive survey, see Mark Bevir's *The Making of British Socialism*.

[2] See, for example, George Bernard Shaw's claim that "Marx's theory of value and the explanation of surplus value he founded on it are academic blunders; and the dialectic … can now only make Communist thinking difficult and uncongenial. Morris put all that aside instinctively as the intellectual trifling it actually is, and went straight to the real issues on which he was quite simple and quite right" ("Morris As I Knew Him" x).

[3] See Meier's two-volume biography *William Morris: The Marxist Dreamer*.

weight of three decades as an artist, craftsman and poet. The question of the reconciliation of Morris the romantic artist with Morris the socialist has been addressed extensively by numerous scholars and critics, both in well-known works such as E. P. Thompson's *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* and in more recent texts such as Ruth Kinna's *William Morris: The Art of Socialism*.

Much less – indeed, hardly anything at all of real substance – has been said about Morris's real and important connection with another tradition: that of early-to-mid nineteenth-century radicalism in its various forms. Of those forms, there are three with particular relevance to Morris: the polemical works of William Cobbett, the utopian world-building of Robert Owen and the Chartist poetry of Ernest Jones. Each, in its own way, constitutes a particular point in a distinct continuum of radical thought of which Morris is a later part. And yet very little has been written on the subject as a whole, in spite of the myriad and illuminating similarities between those works of earlier radicals specified above and Morris's own work, as well as Morris's own explicit references to them in his lectures and his creative work. Indeed, Morris appears to have read as much Cobbett and Owen as he did Marx during the days of his socialist autodidacticism (Thompson, *William Morris* 269; 306), and the political organisations of which he was a member not only counted many old Chartists among their number but even re-issued Chartist literature.

In spite of the general neglect of the subject, a few critics have acknowledged the relation which Morris bears to the figures mentioned above. Paul Meier, for example, recognises the influence of both Cobbett (1: 106) and Owen on Morris, although he argues that Owen's influence on Morris is restricted to the latter's ultimate rejection of the former (1: 187). David A. Kopp, meanwhile, writes in an article entitled "Two Williams of One Medieval Mind" that "Cobbett … serves as a unique lens through which Morris's Socialist writings can be viewed" (31), before going on to draw a number of parallels between Cobbett and Morris. Ruth Kinna, without direct reference to Morris, positions Owen as part of the context for the development of nineteenth-

century socialism (*The Art of Socialism* 88-90), while E. P. Thompson declares Cobbett to have had a "pronounced influence" on Morris as a writer (*William Morris* 269). Raymond Williams, further, writes in *Culture and Society* that "[t]he nearest figure to [Morris], in his own century, is Cobbett" (160). Ernest Jones is mentioned with less frequency, though Anne Janowitz, in her book *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*, names Morris as a kind of successor to Jones's poetical project of the amalgamation of the individual and the collective (217; 224).

Most of the above critics do not, however, seek to develop the sense of a connection between Morris and either Cobbett, Owen or Jones at length, restricting themselves instead to momentary observations or brief acknowledgements. Where such a connection *is* developed to some degree – such as by Meier or Kopp – there is a frustratingly simplistic search for superficial similarities without much curiosity as to the meaning of those similarities for the figures in question. What I propose to do in this thesis, therefore, is to actually read the works of Cobbett, Owen and Jones *alongside* those of Morris, giving them equal consideration. This will not, moreover, be a simple exercise in comparison and contrast, nor will it be a straightforward search for overt parallels. The overall purpose of this thesis is rather to argue that a view of Morris's political writing as inextricably linked to the earlier radical writers specified above allows a re-evaluation of Morris himself. Examining Morris through the lens of an early nineteenth-century radical culture to which his work is in some ways responding facilitates new perspectives on certain themes in Morris criticism, some of which may be ostensibly familiar – themes such as place, history, militarism or the role of the radical poet. This is not, of course, to argue that Morris's work is simply a reiteration of an earlier radical culture. In examining the common intellectual, political and aesthetic strands which link that earlier tradition and Morris's work, I will pay as much attention to change, transformation, rejection and difference as I will to continuity and similarity.

I will not, furthermore, simply be taking the established critical views of Cobbett, Owen and Jones and making new arguments about Morris in relation to those. Rather, I will begin each chapter with a *re-examination* of the earlier writer in question, in relation to which I will then return to Morris. My aim, in other words, is not to take already-existing critical conceptions of nineteenth-century radicals such as Cobbett, Owen and Jones as gospel and use them in a passive sense to gain a new perspective on Morris's political work only, but rather to actively posit new arguments regarding those figures, and then through those arguments to establish newly understood links between them and Morris. In this way, the arguments made in this thesis will be equally relevant to the study of early nineteenth-century radicalism and later nineteenth-century socialism, thereby establishing a fuller picture of the nature of nineteenth-century radical thought as a whole. The purpose of this thesis is, then, not only to advance new perspectives on Morris himself, but also to identify modes of thought which emerge in the work of Cobbett, Owen and Jones and argue for their persistence – subject to change, transformation and flux – across the nineteenth century, taking Morris as a focal point of particular interest.

Of those mentioned above, the radical writer with whom Morris was most familiar was undoubtedly William Cobbett, and it is for this reason that the first two chapters of this thesis are both concerned with the relationship between the two figures. According to J. W. Mackail, his first biographer, Morris knew Cobbett's *Rural Rides* (1830) "almost by heart" (1: 220), and certainly Morris was very fond of that work, as he was of *Cottage Economy* (1821) and *Advice to Young Men* (1829). Indeed, Cobbett "rapidly became one of the classics read aloud in the family circle" (Meier 1: 99), and in the summer of 1883, when Morris was beginning to commit himself wholeheartedly to socialism, he wrote to his publishers Ellis & White, asking them to procure the entire works of Cobbett, or as many of his books as they could find. "While he was reading Marx," Fiona MacCarthy notes, "Morris was also steeping himself in Cobbett's writings" (468). Morris admired Cobbett's "romantic functionalist"

(469) prose style, which, according to both E. P. Thompson and Paul Meier, was a direct inspiration for Morris's own style in his writing for newspapers such as *Justice* and *Commonweal* (Thompson, *William Morris* 269; Meier 1: 99). Moreover, Cobbett and Morris had "a mutual affinity for England's medieval past, and a conviction that the greater social and economic freedoms enjoyed by labourers in 'Old England' could be used in support of their own agenda for radical political and social reform" (Kopp 31). As well as an intense interest in history – specifically England's late-medieval history and its relation to the economic and political arrangements of the contemporary moment – Morris and Cobbett also shared an intense and abiding interest in (as well as a deep affection for) the English countryside.

In his well-known work *Rural Rides*, Cobbett draws mostly on the landscapes of England's rural South as a means by which his broader political project might be made manifest. Journeying across rural England (and it is almost entirely England, specifically its southern counties) Cobbett adopts an interpretive or interrogative attitude to the landscapes he encounters, while all the time ensuring that such landscapes are actually *constituted* in the text in a comprehensive and tangible way. In the process of making place political, Cobbett first encounters an already-existing place, surveying it with an eye which is at once broad and specific, before coming to read into it particular political characteristics. Such characteristics are tied especially to the material circumstances of the rural labourer: a landscape might serve as an articulation of England's political malaise if the nature of it tends towards the degradation or impoverishment of that labourer, while another landscape, if it serves to nourish and sustain the labourer on the land, might speak of the prospects of political renewal. Essentially, Cobbett reads place through the lens of his own political convictions, convictions which such readings then serve to express and elucidate.

Morris, like Cobbett, makes extensive use of the idea of place to articulate a political vision. Indeed, for both Cobbett and Morris, the experience of place is an absolutely vital and fundamental element of the political. In *News*

from Nowhere Morris sometimes echoes Cobbett, both in his political exploration of place and in the ways in which such explorations are conducted. The novel's protagonist William Guest explores and traverses the realm of Nowhere in a distinctly Cobbettian fashion, using place in a highly imaginative way to illustrate a particular political vision, just as Cobbett does. At the same time, however, Morris's political sense of place represents a departure from the Cobbettian mode. Where Cobbett is concerned mostly with interpretation, Morris engages in a process of active creation. Treating the ostensibly familiar environments of London and the banks of the upper Thames as sites of renewal and transformation, Morris uses imaginatively *constructed* places as the means of unfolding his own particular vision of a truly communist society characterised by contentment and pleasure. It is in this sense that Morris both situates himself within the Cobbettian tradition of a political vision which coheres around the concept of place and at the same time develops his own distinct notion of the political experience of place within that tradition.

Another Cobbettian position which Morris both takes up and adapts is that of the radical historian. Both Cobbett and Morris are concerned with the ways in which the study of history – especially the history of the development of capitalism – might hold the keys to understanding, as well as vanquishing, the miseries and injustices of nineteenth-century capitalism, whether in Cobbett's era or in Morris's. Cobbett, for his part, is a radical historian possessed of a particular, almost monomaniacal focus. As his well-known *History of the Protestant Reformation* (1824-1826) demonstrates, Cobbett's historical vision is, famously, fixed with a wrathful firmness on the protestant Reformation, especially as it occurred in England during the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century. For Cobbett, such an event constitutes *the* single point of catastrophe and plunder out of which nineteenth-century capitalism eventually grew, to the ongoing degradation of the English labourer (again, Wales, Scotland and Ireland receive little attention). Importantly, however, the purpose of such a relentless pursuit of historical blame is not solely rhetorical, nor is it confined to the supposed correction of historical

inaccuracies dishonestly perpetuated by the ruling class. Rather, Cobbett uses such determined specificity to sharpen history to a point, in order that it might then be used as a political weapon. Shaping his own picture of the historical development of capitalism into a crude but effective force, Cobbett then seeks to put that force to practical use, whether by stoking the flames of popular protest or by defending the political and material situation of the labourer in Parliament. For Cobbett, history not only serves as a method of bolstering a political argument in the abstract, it is also a practical means of political warfare.

Morris is not generally thought to possess such a singular focus as Cobbett in his vision of history. Certainly, Morris's engagement with history – especially with the medieval – was considerably more profound and wide-ranging than Cobbett's. An examination of Morris's conception of the development of capitalism, however, reveals a surprisingly Cobbettian characteristic which has hitherto gone unobserved: though he does not seek to instrumentalise history in such a direct and belligerent fashion as Cobbett, and nor does he obsess quite so fervently over the dissolution of the monasteries, yet Morris, like Cobbett, situates the birth of capitalism – and the simultaneous decline of feudalism – quite firmly in the sixteenth century. Indeed, Morris is just as firm in his assignment of historical blame to the century of the Reformation as Cobbett is, and just as sure of the calamitous consequences of those changes from that time to his own. In this sense, Morris's socialist conception of history represents a continuation of Cobbett's own radical historical vision.

Of course, Morris is by no means a *predominantly* Cobbettian historian. Rather, Morris's focus on the sixteenth century as the site of the initial development of capitalism is situated within a broader historical view, one which clearly displays the influence of various intellectual currents with which Morris was interacting during his socialist years. One of the most prominent of these currents was Marxist thought, both in terms of the work of Marx himself and Marx's interpreters in the late-Victorian socialist movement. From Marx,

Morris derived a firm economic focus, as well as a particular conception of the material changes which took place in the sixteenth century, to which Morris added his own particular interest in the guilds of craft. From his fellow socialist Ernest Belfort Bax, meanwhile, Morris derived a view of history as a spiral. In this view, the course of human history is at once cyclical and progressive, with each cycle representing a modified resurrection of its predecessor as the spiral moves ultimately towards its conclusion: the advent of communism. Another of the intellectual currents with which Morris interacted was, of course, expressed in the culturalist arguments of A. W. N. Pugin and especially of John Ruskin. Via these figures, Morris conceived of art, and especially of architecture, as the primary means by which the spirit of any given historical period might be most fully expressed, paying particular attention to the situation of the labourer and the nature of their work.

As a result of the interaction and absorption of the above influences, Morris's own conception of the sixteenth century becomes, while Cobbettian in one sense, distinctly Morrisian in another. Indeed, in this sense Morris's view of the development of capitalism represents a kind of expanded, re-situated Cobbett-ism. In the tumultuous, sometimes catastrophic period of capitalism's infancy, Morris sees not merely the beginning of a linear process of England's decline and fall but instead a point of particular importance in the spiral of human history. As a result of such an integration of a Cobbettian assignment of historical blame with his own broad view of historical change, Morris is led to perceive in the sixteenth century a particular and momentous occurrence: the resurrection, though in an altered form, of the conditions of classical slavery, both in a material and a cultural sense, which carries on from that time to Morris's nineteenth-century present. In material terms, Morris draws numerous parallels between the unfree situation of the Greek or Roman slave, as well as the structures which allowed such slavery to exist, and the plight of the oppressed labourer under capitalism and the society which perpetuates that plight. Correspondingly, Morris conceives of the decline of the Gothic and the rise of neoclassicism as an expression of the return, again in an altered

but recognisable form, of the arrogance, rigidity and stratification of classical slave societies. Of course, such a cyclical notion of history allows Morris, in the end, to orient his historical vision towards the future, envisioning in a true communist society the revived, rejuvenated spirit of the medieval Gothic spirit of working. Such a projection into the future is something of which Cobbett is ultimately incapable.

After William Cobbett, the early radical figure whom Morris seems to have read with the most frequency and attention is Robert Owen, the subject of the third chapter of this thesis. In 1882, around the same time he first began to read Marx (or even before), Morris was reading Owen (alongside Henry George, Alfred Russel Wallace and the French Utopian Socialists) (Thompson, *William Morris* 269), and he continued to do so in 1883, apparently with considerable enthusiasm (270; 306). In "The Hopes of Civilization", Morris mentions "the honoured name of Robert Owen … as representative of the nobler hopes of his day … and the lifter of the torch of Socialism" (70). Though disdainful of the Owenite co-operative movement which emerged after Owen's death, which was for Morris "merely an improved form of joint-stockery" (77), he nonetheless credited Owen as an early proponent of the notion that "the conditions under which man lived could affect his life and his deeds infinitely, [and] that not selfish greed and ceaseless contention, but brotherhood and co-operation were the bases of true society" (70-71). It is precisely Owen's picture of this "true society" – his utopian vision – which will be the focus of my analysis in the first part of the chapter.

As will be seen, one of the key debates in Owen scholarship revolves around the nature of the path to the creation of his utopia. Specifically, the debate concerns the extent to which Owen's vision allows the working class itself both agency and autonomy as it sets about constructing his new moral world. Numerous critics and historians have addressed this question, among them Raymond Williams, Margaret Cole, Gregory Claeys and J. F. C. Harrison, with some charging Owen with a kind of authoritarian paternalism and others declaring him to be, though sometimes autocratic in his methods, ultimately

concerned with effecting the true liberation of the working class. Neither of these judgements is necessarily incorrect – rather, both are, in a sense, true at the same time. Owen's conception of the creation of utopia by the working class is in fact characterised by an unresolved tension between an autocratic impulse on the one hand (along with a frequently adopted attitude of disdain for workers themselves) and, on the other, a genuine desire to utterly revolutionise the material, social, moral and intellectual situation of the working class in order that it might ultimately govern itself in a blissful, almost Edenic state of harmony. Indeed, such an unresolved tension produces a specific tendency in Owen's work, one which has so far been neglected by critics. This tendency is towards a certain kind of militarism: in Owen's work there is a sense of proletarian *agency* as the ultimate desirable outcome, but that is only to be achieved through a form of control which deprives workers of any real sense of *autonomy*. This form of control resembles nothing so closely as the marshalling of a military force – not in a violent or warlike sense but rather in broader terms of organisation, character and a specific kind of discipline.

Morris's own conception of the working class engaged in the creation of communist society is, of course, starkly different from Owen's in a whole variety of ways. Morris is deeply concerned with working-class autonomy, and it is only through the self-directed, and, vitally, *revolutionary* action of the working class that, for him, the road to communist society might be embarked upon. The pictures of revolutionary struggle in texts such as *News from Nowhere*, *Pilgrims of Hope* (1885) and *A Dream of John Ball* (1886) little resemble Owen's model communities and new moral systems. Indeed, the depictions of unconcealed class struggle in Morris's works, which would have been utter anathema to Owen, often place such an explicit emphasis on confrontation that Ingrid Hanson has accused Morris of possessing a preoccupation with heroic violence. As with Owen and the charge of authoritarianism, however, such a critical judgement misses certain important subtleties. Though he is very occasionally prone to glorifying violent acts, on the whole Morris exhibits a more nuanced approach to confrontation and

struggle between classes than Hanson allows. Indeed, the specifics of this approach place Morris alongside Owen in an important respect: like Owen, Morris embraces a certain kind of militarism in his vision of a working class engaged in the creation of a new political world. Such militarism is in both cases, moreover, to serve purposes other than outright war or violence. But where Owen is concerned with militarism on the level of organisation and control, Morris's militarism is manifested on the level of the individual, in the spheres of affect, emotion and self-discipline.

Unlike Cobbett or Owen, Morris never mentions Ernest Jones by name anywhere in his writing, nor is there any absolutely firm evidence of Morris having read Jones's Chartist poetry. There is, however, ample evidence of a more general link between Chartism and the early socialist groups of which Morris was a member. Among the executive members of the fledgling Democratic Federation – shortly to become the Social Democratic Federation – was an old Chartist, James Murray (Barrow and Bullock 9). The SDF itself was originally formed as a federation of London's old working-class Radical clubs, and H. M. Hyndman – the "main animator" of the SDF – had told Karl Marx that the Federation was actually intended to be a *revival* of Chartism (10). As Mark Bevir has pointed out, meanwhile, the active Chartist James Bronterre O'Brien – whose political focus was predominantly on land reform (109-110) – represents an important link between Chartism and early socialism. O'Brien amassed a considerable political following during the 1850s and 1860s, a large portion of which later joined the SDF (110). Indeed, as Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock have argued, much of the political programme of the early SDF was distinctly Chartist in character (10).

Morris himself would certainly have come into contact with a few old Chartists during his years as an active socialist, among them James Murray, his brother Charles (also an O'Brienite who supervised the arrangements for O'Brien's funeral and gave a lecture for the SDF in 1884 on his personal recollections of the man (Bevir 110)) and E. T. Craig, an "old Chartist and survivor of a co-operative commune established on an absentee landlord's

estate at Rulahine in Ireland" (MacCarthy 491). Morris was also in some sort of contact with the old Chartist and artisan W. J. Linton (not associated with any socialist group) who satirised Morris's anthem for the Eastern Question Association "Wake, London Lads!" in a letter to the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* in 1878 (though it is doubtful whether Morris saw this letter), and whom Morris later attempted to persuade to join the SDF in a letter of October 1883 (though it is unclear if Morris knew whom he was addressing, especially as he was simply writing in response to a letter of Linton's requesting Morris's permission to reprint some of his lyrics in a collection of English verse) (Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour* 215).[4] Finally, Morris appears to have worked closely in his political activities with the old Chartist John Sketchley. Sketchley had been appointed as Secretary of the South Leicestershire Chartist Society as a young man, and, maintaining his radical and internationalist opinions even after the decline of Chartism, founded the Birmingham Republican Association in 1875, a body which, according to E. P. Thompson, "can almost certainly claim to have been the first English society of the modern Socialist movement" (*William Morris* 280). Sketchley was, in the latter years of the nineteenth century (and even into the twentieth), a dedicated member of both the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League, and his diligence and hard work earned Morris's particular praise (279-280).

Not only was Morris personally acquainted with a small number of actual Chartists, he also appears to have perceived the value of Chartist literary culture, particularly its poetry and song. Certainly the potential of this body of work was known to the socialist movement as a whole: in 1919 John Bruce Glasier, Morris's former comrade in the SDF and later the Socialist League, wrote in a preface to a pamphlet entitled *Socialism in Song: An Appreciation of William Morris's 'Chants for Socialists'* that "the [socialist] movement has made use of and has popularised songs by Blake, Shelley,

[4] Though Morris may not have been particularly aware of W. J. Linton, some of his comrades in the early socialist movement, such as Walter Crane, Arthur Mackmurdo and Emery Walker, certainly were. Indeed, Crane had once been an apprentice in Linton's workshop. (Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour* 215).

Ebenezer Elliott, Ernest Jones and the Chartist singers, Russell Lowell, Whittier, and other writers, which otherwise would now be unsung and forgotten among the people" (2). Indeed, the *Commonweal* itself published a great deal of Chartist poetry during the years of Morris's editorship. Much of this was anonymous poetry taken directly from the old Chartist periodicals, although the work of some established Chartist poets was also published, chief among them Ernest Jones (Miller, *Slow Print* 195).

Whether or not Morris ever actually read Jones's Chartist poetry – and there seems to have been plenty of opportunity for him to have done so – it is abundantly clear that Morris's *Chants for Socialists* are, in many senses, distinctly Jonesean in character. That is, Morris attempts in them something similar to what Jones attempts in his own poetry, and at the same time both poets are limited in their respective attempts by similar shortcomings. This is the subject of the fourth and final chapter of this thesis.

Anne Janowitz argues that Ernest Jones's Chartist poetry represents a kind of radical synthesis of the individual and the collective. Janowitz is correct insofar as this is essentially what Jones is *trying* to achieve, but his success in this poetic endeavour is far from perfect. Indeed, though at the very end of his career as a Chartist poet Jones does indeed achieve such a synthesis, for most of that career his poetic position is, contrary to Janowitz's argument, fraught, wary and in constant flux, with Jones both hesitant to place himself within the working-class culture of Chartism and reluctant to distinguish himself from it. As a result, his poetic perspective often veered from that of the isolated individual to a confused and often exclusionary (as far as working-class Chartists themselves were concerned) sense of the collective, and back again.

Like Jones's poems, Morris's *Chants for Socialists* represent an attempt to integrate the individual poet into the socialist collective. In some instances, indeed, Morris performs such an integration in a way which actually develops Jones's formula. Rather than attempting to simply amalgamate the individual and the collective Morris instead tries – at times successfully – to facilitate the entry of the distinct figure of the socialist poet into a newly conceived culture

of non-hierarchical social (and socialist) relations. At the same time, when they are read alongside Jones's Chartist poems, it becomes clear that the *Chants* suffer from similar defects to those which limit Jones's work. At certain points, Morris lapses into a ventriloquising mode which serves to obfuscate working-class experience and effectively excludes that class – which is supposed to constitute the greater part of the collective into which Morris is trying to integrate himself as a poet – from the non-hierarchical culture specified above, compromising its integrity. At other times, meanwhile, Morris takes on a subtly didactic position in his poetry, placing himself above or outside of that same culture. Both in a productive and in a limiting sense, then, Morris's *Chants for Socialists* are poems very much in the vein of Jones's Chartist works.

Though all were in some sense radical opponents of capitalism as it existed in the first half of the nineteenth century, neither Ernest Jones, nor Robert Owen, nor William Cobbett would have considered themselves to be socialists in the late nineteenth-century sense of the word, and indeed all three were deceased before the modern socialist movement even began to properly take shape. Nonetheless, particular forms of political writing and thought which first emerged with those earlier radical figures are clearly identifiable some five decades on in the works of Morris, perhaps one of the most well-known late-Victorian socialists. In spite of both their temporal and their political differences, Morris the socialist readily perceived the political, literary and intellectual value of his earlier radical predecessors, and, in ways hitherto unobserved by critics, set about absorbing and adapting various elements of their work.

Out of the three radical figures in question, the one from whom Morris most differs on a political level is perhaps William Cobbett. A cantankerous ex-Tory and self-styled countryman who was at pains to preserve the institution of private property, Cobbett's political outlook was, in some senses, worlds away from Morris's own hopeful vision of a communist society. And yet, both in terms of a political sense of place and in terms of a radical history of capitalist society, the distinct presence of Cobbett can be readily felt across Morris's socialist works.

William Cobbett, William Morris and the Politics of Place

Section I: Landscape and Labour in William Cobbett's *Rural Rides*

In his biography of William Cobbett, published in 1924, prominent socialist and Morris devotee G. D. H. Cole[5] wrote that "[o]n horseback, riding down into the Shires, out of the fog of the detested 'Wen,' Cobbett is at his ease. When the last stock-jobber's house in Kensington has been left behind, and he is in the open country … he feels at home" (*Life of William Cobbett* 319). Cobbett was – or at least saw himself as – the consummate English yeoman farmer: "bedecked in his red waistcoat … tall, stout, ruddy-faced and beef-loving … deeply rooted both in the past and in a rhythm of life attuned to the soil, and the seasons" (Claeys, "Are We in England?" 19). "I was", Cobbett wrote of himself, "bred at the plough-tail, and in the Hop-Gardens of Farnham in Surrey, my native place … I was brought up under a father, whose talk was chiefly about his garden and his fields" (Cobbett, *The Progress of a Plough-boy* 2). This was no invention: unlike William Morris, who cherished childhood memories of the Essex countryside but was never himself involved in rural labour of any sort, Cobbett's early life was thoroughly agricultural. As a boy, Cobbett worked as a ploughboy and gardener – his first job on the farm, at four years old, was to drive small birds from the turnip seed and keep the peas safe from rooks (Spater 1: 8). In 1805, after a number of years' residence in the United States following his decision first to join the army and then to become embroiled in a risky legal dispute with his own officers, Cobbett bought a farm at the village of Botley in the county of Hampshire. The farm remained his primary residence until 1817 (not counting his two years' residence at Newgate gaol). In 1820, after his return from the United States, he purchased a four-acre seed farm in Kensington, and in 1827 he purchased and ran an eighty-acre farm near the Thames at Barn Elms, where he experimented with

[5] For an account of Cole's interest in Cobbett, see Martin J. Wiener's "The Changing Image of William Cobbett" 144-148.

agricultural techniques until the time of his death in 1835.[6] Shortly before he died, he wrote in an account of his life:

> Born among husbandmen, bred to husbandry, delighting in its pursuits even to the minutest details, never having, in all my range of life, lost sight of the English farm-house and of those scenes in which my mind took its first spring, it is natural that I should have a strong partiality for country life, and that I should enter more in detail into the feelings of labourers in husbandry than into those of other labourers. (Cobbett, *The Progress of a Plough-boy* 285).

As Karl W. Schweizer and John W. Osborne argue, "[Cobbett's] writings consistently [reflect] his lifelong love of the countryside and abiding concern for its inhabitants" (157).

The time in which Cobbett was writing was one of acute distress for many of the rural labourers of England, for whom Cobbett endeavoured to be a kind of radical figurehead. While there has been some debate regarding the exact nature and scale of rural change and its effect on English society,[7] it remains difficult to argue that the average rural labourer – especially in Cobbett's native country, the rural South – experienced anything other than a process of gradual but inexorable decline, "as bad as anything in the long centuries of exploitation and degradation" (Williams, *The Country and the City* 262). As the historian of rural protest John E. Archer has written, there is "a large measure of agreement on the condition of the farm labourers who, during

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[6] Recent biographies of Cobbett include Anthony Burton's short book *William Cobbett: Englishman* (1997) and Richard Ingrams's *The Life and Adventures of William Cobbett* (2005). The most comprehensive and thorough account of Cobbett's life is George Spater's two-volume work *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend* (1982).

[7] Some historians, for example G. E. Mingay in such works as *Enclosure and the Small Farmer in the Age of the Industrial Revolution*, have argued that the scale of the decline of small farmers and owner-occupiers was relatively small. Others – not only J. L. and Barbara Hammond in their well-known book *The Village Labourer*, but also, for example John E. Archer in *Social Unrest and Popular Protest in England 1780-1840* – have argued that the impact of parliamentary enclosures represent something closer to a process of marginalisation and dispossession – or at the very least a marked deterioration in conditions – endured by the small farmers of rural England.

the course of the eighteenth century, experienced a progressive deterioration in terms of both their standard of living and their quality of life" (8).[8]

It was against this process of degradation – and against the "conglomeration of war profiteers, debt financiers, enclosing landowners, government placemen, and 'stock jobbers' (stockbrokers), who together facilitated a redistribution of wealth from the traditional agricultural sector in the countryside to a parasitic new financial elite in London" (Benchimol 258-259) – that Cobbett set himself.[9] When William Morris wrote about enclosure and mercantile agriculture – which was not often – his focus was mainly on the more historically remote sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rather than his own nineteenth century ("The Hopes of Civilization" 62; "Architecture and History" 308). Cobbett, however, saw a crisis of rural society unfolding before his eyes, and was moved to do something about it. As Ian Dyck has pointed out, "we too readily forget that farm workers comprised the single largest occupational group in Regency England" (*Rural Popular Culture* 2). Amongst the prominent radical reformers of the early nineteenth century – such as Francis Place, Francis Burdett and William Lovett – Cobbett was effectively the sole defender[10] of this group in England,[11] which was otherwise regarded as too craven or ignorant to have any real political consciousness (Dyck,

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[8] Similar arguments are made by J. M. Neeson in *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England 1700-1820* (223), Peter Linebaugh in *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance* (144-145) and Kathryn Beresford in "'Witnesses for the Defence': The Yeomen of Old England and the Land Question, c. 1815-1837" (38).

[9] For a detailed account of Cobbett as a countryside radical see Ian Dyck's "William Cobbett and the Rural Radical Platform", as well as his book *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture*.

[10] Ian Dyck points out that Henry Hunt might be regarded as an exception to Regency radicalism's disregard for rural labourers, though in Dyck's account Hunt only shared Cobbett's sympathies "intermittently" (*Rural Popular Culture* 4).

[11] It is specifically the labourers of *England* that Cobbett is usually concerned with defending, and in particular the labourers of the rural counties of Southern England. Though Cobbett did, in the last years of his life, conduct fruitful tours of Northern England and Scotland – as well as becoming MP for the town of Oldham, near Manchester – the core of his rural radicalism remained firmly rooted in counties such as Wiltshire, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire and Kent.

"William Cobbett and the rural radical platform" 186).[12] Whether or not he actually was the hale and hearty yeoman figure that he made himself out to be, a very large part of Cobbett's political life was given over entirely to the cause of the rural labourer, whose interests he wanted to safeguard as part of the larger movement for parliamentary reform (Dyck, *Rural Popular Culture* 5). Though ferociously opinionated on such apparently purely political subjects as the national debt and paper currency, Cobbett's various political stances had as their firm basis what Ian Dyck has called the "three Bs: bread, bacon and beer" (209). Along with such things as "a pig, access to common land and the recovery of joint-stools, pewter dishes and the fustian coat", these three Bs – as much desired by the labourers themselves as by Cobbett on their behalf – stood for a kind of fundamental economic freedom for the rural labourer, embodied in "the possession of basic material comforts and a self-sufficient cottage economy" (210). As Dyck observes, "[Cobbett] integrated the three Bs into his search for the economic justice and political democracy that the term 'radicalism' properly denotes" (214). Cobbett really did endeavour to bring about reform a labourer could eat, and was not shy of engaging directly with his intended audience in order to do so: "no other intellectual of the period dedicated himself so tirelessly to engaging with his readership in forums like alehouse lectures, market dinners, and country meetings" (Benchimol 260). His book *Cottage Economy* is devoted entirely to the condition – right down to diet and furniture – of English rural labourers, and indeed, acting as an instruction book for forgotten rural crafts, is designed expressly to improve their

[12] Of course, numerous historians have demonstrated that precisely the opposite is true: rural populations – especially but not exclusively in counties such as Kent, Sussex and Hampshire – had been engaged in various forms of either quasi-political or straightforwardly political protest against the encroachments of mercantile agriculture since at least the beginning of the eighteenth century. This has been demonstrated not only in such classic works as E. P. Thompson's *Whigs and Hunters* and Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé's *Captain Swing*, but also in more recent works such as *Class Conflict and Protest in the English Countryside, 1700-1880*, a collection of essays edited by Mick Reed and Roger Wells, and Carl J. Griffin's *Protest, Politics and Work in Rural England, 1700-1850*. Further, William Cobbett himself was very much connected to and in dialogue with this pre-existing culture of rural protest, as Ian Dyck has shown in *William Cobbett and Rural Popular Culture*.

lives in the most material sense. Cobbett's *Rural Rides* – a travelogue, with which Cobbett "is now virtually synonymous" (Grande 148), of his journeys through rural (mostly Southern and South-Western) England,[13] serialized throughout the 1820s in his *Political Register* – is sometimes conceived of as an example of "romantic pastoralism" (Claeys, "Are We in England?" 19) or as "naïve" and "innocently … responsive" (Sambrook 156). In fact, the book is filled with clear-eyed and frank assessments of – as well as laments for – the material condition of rural labourers, constituting "a new form of materialist cultural criticism in the early nineteenth century" (Benchimol 261). One of the most well-known lines from the *Rides* is an apt example: Cobbett meets a labourer by the roadside and enquires about his diet. Delighted to hear that the labourer gets plenty of bacon and good bread, Cobbett remarks that (alluding to the increasing prevalence of potato-based diets) "[n]o society ought to exist, where the labourers live in a hog-like sort of way" (126). His first concern is with the vital facts of the labourer's life. Even a month before his death, barely able to speak, Cobbett went to great lengths to attend a debate on a parliamentary motion on agricultural distress, after which "the exertion of speaking and remaining late to vote … were too much for one already severely unwell" (Cobbett, *The Progress of a Plough-boy* 289).

For Cobbett, it is the *landscapes* of rural England in particular wherein the political issues affecting the impoverished and degraded nineteenth-

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[13] Cobbett's *Rural Rides* was neither the first nor the last attempt in the long nineteenth century to survey the material conditions of rural life and work in England. During the latter years of the eighteenth century, Arthur Young – whom Cobbett appears to have read (*Rural Rides* 257) – was a prolific writer on the subject. Although better known for his tours of Ireland and France, Young published numerous works on rural England which were the product of first-hand investigation, including *A Six Weeks' Tour through the Southern Counties of England and Wales* (1768) and *The Farmer's Tour Through the East of England* (1771). In 1797 Frederick Eden published *The State of the Poor*, which was both a work of history and of careful observation of the facts of contemporary rural life. At the opposite end of the century are H. Rider Haggard's *Rural England* (1902) – a collection of observations resulting from Haggard's touring of England and Wales – and James E. Thorold Rogers's ambitious seven-volume work of economic history entitled *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England* (1866-1902).

century agricultural labourer are made manifest. William Morris was, for his part, not so exclusively rural, nor so particularly focussed on landscapes. Though his ideal Nowherian places are, as will be seen, certainly verdant and blooming, and depictions of fields and forests abound in his utopian novel *News from Nowhere*, nonetheless Morris's places are as much urban (though in a renewed sense) as they are rural, and as much focussed on the *experience* of place in a more multifaceted and sensual sense as they are on comprehensive visual depictions of particular places. Cobbett, however, is firmly rooted in the landscapes of agricultural England. The English countryside is, for Cobbett, a network of living systems, bound up with a disappearing rural life and the suffering of rural labourers at the hands of nineteenth-century agricultural capitalism. Indeed, critics have readily and correctly pointed out the significance of landscape in Cobbett's writing beyond the mere picturesque – how places and localities take on meanings beyond themselves, signalling the wider processes at work upon the face of England and the life of its people. As James Mulvihill has observed, "[t]hroughout the *Rides* Cobbett is preoccupied with changing concepts of value and the ways in which a radical transvaluation of English culture is manifesting itself in the countryside." (834). "Where for his Romantic contemporaries, landscape may have been a medium of divine immanence", Mulvihill later argues, "for Cobbett it was a medium of national immanence" (838). Likewise, Alex Benchimol argues that "[t]he symbolic interpretation of physical geography in Cobbett's travels reveals another aspect of the materialist intellectual practice he was developing in *Rural Rides*" (264). Even Karl W. Schweizer and John W. Osborne, notably critical of Cobbett's political positions, acknowledge this important aspect of his work: "Cobbett could vividly describe the aesthetic qualities of the landscape, as illustrated in his collection of rural rides in the 1820s. But rarely is a description complete for him without a consideration of the influences of politics and economics on the countryside" (163).

If the nature and significance of Cobbett's landscapes and places in a general sense are well-known, what is less fully explored are *the places*

themselves. Critics rightly point out that Cobbett's places are charged with meaning, but the places themselves are hardly ventured into, and if they are it is a brief excursion in service of a wider point, usually about Cobbett's political stances or his rhetorical method. Plenty is written about what these places mean in a broader sense, but very little is written concerning what they actually *look like*, and *why* Cobbett chooses to depict into them. The following section is intended to constitute an extended critical journey through these places, in order to more fully comprehend the symbolic specifics of Cobbett's geographical-political vision – what his "at once prosaic, visionary and allegorical" (Grande 159) conception of England is, and why it appears as it does. These are questions of considerable importance because, as will be seen, certain specific characteristics of Cobbett's landscapes and places in fact become the very means of his political critique. James Grande has argued that Cobbett's "accumulation of material evidence" in *Rural Rides* is "an attempt to assert his epistemological authority" (149). As I will go on to show, the landscapes of the *Rides* are a vital part of this project. Just as William Morris does with his environments of utopia in *News from Nowhere*, which I will go on to explore later in this chapter, rural English landscapes as Cobbett presents them are the means by which he articulates his own unique political perspective.

Cobbett's Political Landscapes

Many of the passages in *Rural Rides* in which Cobbett describes landscapes are, of course, pointedly neutral – observational accounts of topographically interesting features or places, such as at Dover where Cobbett notes a particular "*chalk-ridge*"[14] which travels parallel with a "*sand-ridge*" (Cobbett, *Rural Rides* 196), or at Wimmering in Hampshire,[15] as well as innumerable

[14] Cobbett very often uses italics to emphasise certain words. Wherever I have quoted him the emphases are Cobbett's own, unless otherwise indicated.

[15] Wimmering, now within the city of Portsmouth, is today more usually known as Wymering.

other places, where everything is rendered in purely agricultural terms: “The corn under the hill is as good as I ever saw it, except in 1813. No beans here. No peas. Scarcely any oats. Wheat, barley and turnips. The Swedish turnips not so good as on the South Downs and near Funtington, but the wheat full as good” (131). Cobbett, the reader is constantly reminded, is as much a farmer as he is a writer, and is, by the time of the composition of *Rural Rides*, just as much concerned with soil and turnips as with the national debt and parliamentary reform. It is true also that Cobbett is by no means desperate to read politics into every landscape or geographical feature he sees: in the Weald of Kent, for example, he comes across two old oak trees, one “more than thirty feet round, and the other more than twenty seven … but they have been hollow for half a century” (214). For a writer so given to quick transitions from the contemplation of a view to a political tirade, the obvious metaphorical potential of these trees – Old England’s mighty oak, hollowed out by the past few turbulent decades – goes conspicuously unused. This is all the more reason, however, to pay attention to the instances in which Cobbett *does* choose to interpret and analyse landscapes which he considers to be worth paying attention to, instances of which are by no means lacking.

Cobbett is rarely reticent about places which he considers to be meaningful – once he has interpreted a landscape in terms of its political and social meaning, almost every part of it is charged with significance. A fish pond can become a marker of rural harmony and self-sufficiency, while an enclosed cornfield can contain within its topographical specificities the very essence of everything Cobbett is opposed to. Indeed, Cobbett is inclined to voice his full-throated disdain for a landscape as much as he is to declare his earnest admiration for it, and the portrayal of his hated heaths and enclosures reveal as much about Cobbett’s political and aesthetic mode as the landscapes upon which he heaps ardent praise. On the Isle of Thanet in Kent, for example, Cobbett finds himself in a “corn land” (205): “All was corn around me. Barns, I should think, two hundred feet long; ricks of enormous size and most numerous” (206). Cobbett has not yet begun to interpret the landscape, but a

sense of vastness and of space beyond a human scale is already palpable. Featureless expanses of corn, colossal barns and ricks acting as spectacles of overabundance: these are features which do not portend happiness for the inhabitants of the Isle of Thanet. But, having not yet addressed the state of the labourers, Cobbett refrains from reading into the landscape too far. This is shortly to change:

> The labourers' houses, all along through this island, beggarly in the extreme. The people dirty, poor-looking; ragged, but particularly *dirty*. The men and boys with dirty faces, and dirty smock-frocks, and dirty shirts … Invariably have I observed, that the richer the soil, and the more destitute of woods; that is to say, the more purely a corn country, the more miserable the labourers. (206)

Cobbett has, in the manner described by the critics detailed earlier in this chapter, moved from the observation of a landscape to an interpretation of it in a political sense, connecting the rise of large-scale capitalistic agriculture with the reduced situation of the workers who exist alongside and within it. The initial act of surveying the specific landscape of Thanet gives rise to an observation regarding the relation between varying agricultural conditions and the facts of everyday life and labour for the rural worker. Cobbett continues in this vein: "No hedges, no ditches, no commons, no grassy lanes: a country divided into great farms; a few trees surround the great farmhouse. All the rest is bare of trees; and the wretched labourer has not a stick of wood, and has no place for a pig or cow to graze, or even to lie down upon" (206).

In the case of the Isle of Thanet as Cobbettian political landscape, then, *scale* is the key element: the abnormally large size of the farmhouses, barns and hayricks, the colossal crops of wheat in enclosed farms which stretch on for acres, unbroken by any notable features; bereft even of trees to break the horizon. This language of excessive size and scale extends also to the source and cause of this wretched landscape: "the great, the big bull frog" which "grasps all", Cobbett's disdainful term for the wealthy tax-eaters and large farmers who appropriate "every inch of land" (206). Such descriptions are not, of course, limited to the Isle of Thanet: in an "execrable tract" (66) of land at the end of a "blackguard heath" near Windsor Forest, Cobbett comes upon a

new enclosure, “all made into ‘*grounds*’ and gardens by *tax-eaters*”. Again, this new enclosure is of an over-sized scale: “the inhabitants of it have beggared twenty agricultural villages and hamlets” (67). This landscape consists of an unnatural agglomeration of smaller places, the conjoining of which alters its scale, creating a landscape essentially uninhabitable for the majority of labourers on the land: “These new enclosures and houses arise out of the beggaring of the parts of the country distant from the vortex of the funds. The farm-houses have long been growing fewer and fewer; the labourers’ houses fewer and fewer … the villages are regularly wasting away” (66-67). This situation is in turn linked to the broader economic and political situation: “the infernal system of Pitt and his followers has annihilated three parts out of four of the farm-houses” (67).

For Cobbett, then, an agricultural landscape which is excessively large – which is not, in other words, on a human scale – is an undesirable one. This is not merely an aesthetic judgement, however – it is, as always, tied to the state of the labourer. To return to the Isle of Thanet: here, the land is so vast and so unbroken that “the work is almost all done by the horses. The horses plough the ground; they sow the ground; they hoe the ground; they carry the corn home; they thresh it out; and they carry it to market … so that they do the whole, except the reaping and the mowing”. “It is impossible”, Cobbett continues, “to have an idea of any thing more miserable than the state of the labourers in this part of the country” (206). Because the land is flat enough that a horse is able to do most of the work that a number of labourers would otherwise do, the demand for labour is lessened and so the situation of the labourer is worsened. Further, such a vast, uniform system of farming is an explicit symbol of mercantile agriculture: a single crop is grown on a massive scale in order that it can be traded on the free market. No part of the actual produce of the land belongs to the labourer in any tangible sense, rather they are paid a cash wage and rent their accommodation. They become, as Alex Benchimol puts it, “in a state of dependence” (261), landless and propertyless, subject only to the cash nexus which has replaced any feudal-style ties to the

land or to custom. Cobbett's palpable disdain for the landscape of Thanet is, then, inextricably tied to the fact that it is essentially inimical to the well-being of the labourer, so that his description of the vastness of Thanet's corn lands becomes itself a political critique. Expanses of corn and dilapidated houses become symbols of exploitation and degradation. Rather than moving outward or upward from the landscape, towards an abstract political argument, Cobbett instead remains *in* the landscape, synthesising the various geographic and topographical characteristics which he originally observed with a social and economic interpretation of them. Cobbett's described landscape then effectively becomes a place which, rather than inspiring an intellectual move outward towards greater meaning and significance instead becomes itself *permeated with* meaning and significance. As will be seen, a similar process of environmental signification occurs in William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, though, importantly, where Morris's sense of place is inventive and creative, Cobbett's is interrogative and interpretive. Unlike Morris, Cobbett does not transform the landscapes which he describes, but rather causes them to signify in new ways. Through what Leonora Nattrass has identified as Cobbett's "mixture of symbolism and specificity" (123), the associations which any given place brings about are turned back onto the place itself, which, remaining all the while a thoroughly tangible landscape, becomes charged with political potential. Trees, ditches and fields are not merely inspirations for political critique but are themselves the instruments of that critique. Cobbett remains rooted to the earth, while his political argument remains firmly grounded in the material.

If size is a great geographical evil for Cobbett, representing the alienation from the land of the rural labourers by an economic force far greater than themselves, so too is emptiness and sparseness. Near Alresford in Hampshire, Cobbett observes that surrounding counties have "suffered most cruelly from the accursed Pitt-system." He complains of their "bleakness" and the fact that "the tax-eating crew" have "pared them down to the very bone." "The villages", he laments, "are all in a state of *decay*. The farm-buildings

dropping down, bit by bit. The produce is, by a few great farmers, dragged to a few spots" (78). Likewise, at the estate of Lord Erskine near Horsham in Sussex, Cobbett travels through a number of "miserable miles." "It was", he recalls, "a *bare heath*, with here and there, in the better parts of it, some scrubby *birch* … in short, it is a most villanous [sic] tract … I have seldom travelled over eight miles so well calculated to fill the mind with painful reflections." The reason for such an appearance is that the place was once "a large common, *now enclosed* … and the labourers all driven from its skirts" (113). This quality of sparseness, by itself an essentially neutral geographical characteristic, is inextricable in Cobbett's aesthetic mode from the economic and political circumstances which give rise to it. The sparse, thinly populated character of the landscapes and places which Cobbett detests signals the degradation of their former and current inhabitants. This theme of rural depopulation is not a new one, of course – even in 1770 the poet Oliver Goldsmith was lamenting in his poem "The Deserted Village" that "times are alter'd; Trades unfeeling train / Usurp the land, and dispossess the swain; / Along the lawn, where scatter'd hamlet rose; / Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose" (63-66). Indeed, as Raymond Williams famously demonstrates in *The Country and the City*, such mournful, nostalgic laments for a vanished rural way of life can be observed in the literature of every era since at least the sixteenth century (12-17). With the advent of large-scale agricultural improvement, however – as well as enclosures, the economic and social after-effects of the Napoleonic wars, the Corn Laws, the Speenhamland system and various manifestations of the Poor Laws – the process of dispossession was intensified, and a great many small farmers were forced either to become landless labourers without property of their own or were compelled off the land altogether and into cities and towns (Beresford 38; Hobsbawm 187; Hobsbawm and Rudé 31-36; Neeson 223). Cobbett himself is certainly convinced of this: "The means of living has been drawn away from these villages, and people follow the means" (Cobbett, *Rural Rides* 79). In his excoriation of sparse, empty places, then, Cobbett is mounting, through the

medium of a described landscape, a poignant criticism of the prevailing political system which was indeed changing the ways in which the population of rural England inhabited the land, as well as the land itself (Neeson 223).

Just as Cobbett possessed an intense dislike of certain landscapes, so too did he have landscapes which represented for him something close to perfection. Unlike William Morris, who, as will be seen, constructed his own *imagined* vision of England renewed in *News from Nowhere*, Cobbett interprets already-existing places in order to arrive at his sense of the politically ideal place. One such place is the valley of the river Avon,[16] which Cobbett calls "one of the prettiest spots that can be imagined" (368). Cobbett writes of this valley on two separate occasions in *Rural Rides*, and in both instances the terms of praise are the same. As is common with Cobbett, the reader is presented with a fairly comprehensive geographical account of the place alongside his own opinion of it. In his first account of the Avon, Cobbett observes: "on each side *downs*, very lofty and steep in some places, and sloping miles back in other places; but each *out-side* of the valley are downs. From the edge of the downs begin capital *arable fields*…" (297). Likewise, in the second account, Cobbett writes:

> There is a pretty *ridge of ground*, the base of which is a mile, or a mile and a half wide. On each side of this ridge a branch of the river runs down, through a flat of very fine meadows. The town and the beautiful remains of the famous old Abbey, stand on the rounded spot, which terminates this ridge; and, just below, nearly close to the town, the two branches of the river meet; and then they begin to be called *the Avon*. (368-369)

[16] William Morris acknowledged Cobbett's affection for this particular part of England in *A Dream of John Ball*, in which, in positively Cobbettian tones, he speaks of "a splendid collegiate church, untouched by restoring parson and architect, standing amid an island of shapely trees and flower-beset cottages of thatched grey stone and cob, amidst the narrow stretch of bright green water-meadows that wind between the sweeping Wiltshire downs, so well beloved of William Cobbett" (215). Morris himself shared this fondness, having been educated at Marlborough College, where he developed an abiding affection for the surrounding landscapes and places (MacCarthy 36-40).

Though he is already making some value judgements, Cobbett takes care to clearly constitute the landscape itself as something with definite and tangible characteristics, physically manifested in the world. Again, the land is always more than just a catalyst for abstract contemplation: the land is the basis of Cobbett's politics, and so he is careful to ensure that, in his *Rural Rides*, it is always at first a material and factual thing, to be studied and interpreted.

At the same time as he firmly establishes the immediacy and materiality of the particular landscape of the Avon valley, Cobbett fulsomely sings its praises. In his first account of the place, Cobbett begins "I first saw this *Valley of Avon*; and a most beautiful sight it was! Villages, hamlets, large farms, towers, steeples, fields, meadows, orchards, and very fine timber-trees". Delighted with its agricultural diversity, Cobbett declares that "I never before saw anything to please me like this valley of the Avon" (297). Likewise, in his second visit, Cobbett writes that "[t]he land round about is excellent, and of a great variety of forms. The trees are lofty and fine: so that what with the water, the meadows, the fine cattle and sheep, and, as I hear, the absence of *hard-pinching* poverty, this is a very pleasant place" (369). This "pretty" and "excellent" landscape is almost the exact opposite of the barren heaths and vast cornfields which Cobbett detests. Instead, variety emerges as the ideal characteristic; the presence of difference – and thus of mixed use – is vital. Unlike on the Isle of Thanet, where the influence of mercantile agriculture has made the landscape uniform and featureless, the valley of the Avon maintains not only its fields of corn and wheat but also its forests, rivers and meadows for the keeping of livestock, all of which combine to suggest a thriving and resilient rural economy beyond the mere mass production of cereal crops. This type of economy, Cobbett believes, is conducive to a condition of material abundance for the rural labourer: "I should suppose, that every labouring *man* in this valley raises as much food as would suffice for *fifty* or *a hundred persons*, fed like himself!" (305). Of course, Cobbett realises that most of this produce is appropriated and sold elsewhere, to the severe detriment of the labourers of the Avon valley themselves: "I have to express my deep shame,

as an Englishman, at beholding the general *extreme poverty* of those who cause this vale to produce such quantities of food and raiment" (320). But it is nonetheless the case that there exists in this landscape the *potential* for the rural labourers themselves to provide for all their own immediate material needs – to be self-sufficient, relying on nobody but themselves and their own labour, as opposed to languishing in the miserable state of dependency entailed by a reliance on waged work.

Again, such judgements are not limited to a single landscape: Cobbett makes the same assessments for the same reasons at various other points, though he always takes care to ground these assessments in the geographical specificities of the place in question. In Wiltshire, for example, in the villages of North Bovant[17] and Bishopstrow, there are similar approving descriptions to those of the Avon valley. Whereas nearby Aldbourne is "too naked to please me", North Bovant and Bishopstrow contain, "as appertaining to rural objects, *every thing* that I delight in." There are "[s]mooth and verdant downs in hills", "valleys of endless *variety* as to height and depth and shape" (emphasis added), "rich corn-land, unencumbered by fences", "meadows in due proportion" and "lastly, the homesteads, and villages, sheltered in winter and shaded in summer by lofty and beautiful trees" (411). And again at Uphusband,[18] which is "a sight worth going many miles to see" (438), Cobbett observes – alongside frank assessments of the quality of the soil and the topography of the surrounding hills – that "the surface presents, in the size and form of the fields, in the woods, the hedge-rows, the sainfoin, the young wheat, the turnips, the tares, the fallows, the sheep-folds and the flocks, and, at every turns of your head, a fresh and different set of these" (438-439). Similar descriptions also occur at Chilworth (35), Winchester (256) and Maidstone (257). In most of these examples Cobbett refrains from making explicitly political points, unlike in, for example, his broadly positive assessment of the

[17] North Bovant is more commonly known today as Norton Bavant.
[18] As Cobbett rightly observes, the official name for this place was and remains Hurstbourne Tarrant.

Avon Valley. Indeed, James Grande has suggested that Cobbett exhibits something of a "picturesque emphasis on variety" (158) in his choice of pleasing landscapes, sometimes at the expense of his political focus. However, Cobbett is still making an *implicit* political point in his favourable depiction of these places: his appreciation for them is tied to the fact that they facilitate the persistence of a way of rural life which is antithetical to mass-production, which he associates with the predations of the rich. The variety which so pleases Cobbett is not mere topographical variety, but rather variety of *use*, which is both facilitated by and reflected in the variegated downs, meadows, fields and farmhouses that Cobbett so admires. All the details of the landscapes which Cobbett marks out for praise are indicative of a healthy, diverse and functioning rural economy which has the potential to exist to the benefit of its residents, rather than an inhospitable monocultural expanse.

It is precisely the type of landscape detailed above, in fact, which Cobbett elsewhere singles out as the main refuge of the rural labourer from nineteenth-century agricultural capitalism. Against the flat landscape of Thanet, easily swallowed up by "the rich", Cobbett praises the "rabbit countries" of England. Cobbett does not in this instance identify the specific characteristics of a "rabbit country", but he does posit it as the polar opposite of Thanet's horizontal expanse, suggesting an image of a wooded country of hills and valleys, perhaps difficult to access by road[19] and varied in quality and usage. At another point in the *Rides*, Cobbett is more explicit upon this point: travelling East from Worth, in Sussex, Cobbett observes of the surrounding landscape that "[the labouring people] invariably do best in the *woodland* and *forest* and *wild* countries. Where the mighty grasper has *all under his eye*, they can get but little" (173). Such "rabbit" or "wild" countries as these are, for Cobbett, "the countries for labouring men. There the ground is not so valuable. There it is not so easily appropriated by the few" (206). By praising landscapes

[19] As James Grande has pointed out, "[s]mooth roads are associated [in *Rural Rides*] with new enclosures, the paper system and the flow of people and money towards London" (157).

which are, in the very facts of their topography, inherently resistant to the kind of large-scale agricultural capitalism which he considered to be detrimental to the wellbeing of the rural labourer, Cobbett therefore makes a political point, and in doing so continues to construct and give force to his political sense of place.

It must be pointed out, finally, that Cobbett's ideal landscapes often contain churches or other examples of medieval ecclesiastical architecture. In the Vale of Itchen, for example, Cobbett remarks approvingly that "there are seventeen villages, each having its parish church, upon its borders" (148). In fact, it is during his brief contemplations of specific religious buildings that Cobbett momentarily shifts his perspective from a landscape view to a closer, architectural one. Usually in *Rural Rides* buildings form only a minor, constituent part of Cobbett's broader view of a particular locality, but in these short passages Cobbett actually focusses in on individual structures, momentarily adopting, as will be seen, a sense of place which is closer to that of Morris. For example, at Malmesbury there is a half-ruined abbey which Cobbett remarks upon: "It was once a most magnificent building … which was nevertheless, built in SAXON times, in 'the *dark* ages,' and was built by men, who were not begotten by Pitt nor by Jubilee-George". Cobbett sees in the ruins of this abbey evidence of the degradation of his age in comparison with an idealised medieval era which went beyond mere utilitarianism and, as far as Cobbett was concerned, sought to enrich the minds of its people, and ornament their surroundings:

> There is a broken arch … at which one cannot look up without feeling shame at the thought of ever having abused the men who made it. No one need *tell* any man of sense; he *feels* our inferiority to our fathers, upon merely beholding the remains of their efforts to ornament their country and elevate the minds of the people. (369)

And once again at Winchester cathedral, Cobbett discourses upon the superior nature of medieval society as manifested in its architecture. His son, Richard, asks him "'Why, Papa, nobody can build such places *now*, can they?'", to which Cobbett replies "'No, my dear … That building was made when there

were no poor wretches in England, called *paupers*; when there were no *poor-rates*; when every labouring man was clothed in good woolen [sic] cloth; and when all had a plenty of meat and bread and beer'" (254). Such judgements seem to anticipate in a crude form those of John Ruskin, and subsequently of William Morris – as I will go on to explore later in this chapter, as well as in the next chapter – in placing aesthetic value on Gothic architecture based on its reflection of the supposedly superior conditions of labour of medieval England. Here, again, is an indicator that Cobbett's sense of place stems, at least in a very significant part, directly from a consideration of the situation and condition of the labourer.

In the various instances outlined above, Cobbett combines political and aesthetic judgements into a specific Cobbettian political sense of place. This sense of place is an interrogative and interpretive one – encountering a landscape, Cobbett proceeds to read it in terms of how hospitable it might be to the happiness, comfort and freedom of the rural labourer, before offering his assessment of that landscape as a kind of political critique, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit. Cobbett excoriates certain landscapes because they reflect the most harmful aspects of the ascendant economic and political order. A landscape is not simply bad because it is new or unfamiliar – Cobbett is no "utopian reactionary" (Schweizer and Osborne 105), and is indeed perfectly capable of heaping praise on, for example, carefully landscaped new gardens, if he deems them judiciously planted and their landlord generous and just enough towards his tenants to be worthy of such praise (*Rural Rides* 99-100). Instead, a landscape is explicitly bad for Cobbett because its very features are both the means and the manifestation of the degradation of the rural labourer. Likewise, Cobbett's favoured landscapes seem to point to a vision of what exactly he felt was sorely lacking in the rural England of his time, and, furthermore, a vision he had for a reformed, rejuvenated countryside. Vitally, all of the landscapes which make up Cobbett's political sense of place, whether praised or blamed, possess an overriding sense of being actually-existing places. Cobbett's landscapes *appear in the text* in the most palpable sense,

maintaining always a tangibility which is inextricable from Cobbett's assessment of them. They are, moreover, never finally departed from, remaining instead as essential elements of Cobbett's political writing: Cobbett may use a particular landscape as a springboard from which to launch into a larger political point, but he usually takes care to focus this political point back onto the place itself. In this way, Cobbett's political sense of place – his determined emphasis on the materiality of any given landscape both before and after the evocation of its political connotations – facilitates the maintenance of an unerring focus on the final object of his political critique in *Rural Rides*. This final object is the material circumstances of the rural labourer *on the land*.

Cobbett is sometimes seen as possessing a desire to move backwards – to emulate the agrarian society of his youth. Karl W. Schweizer and John W. Osborne have accused Cobbett of being "reactionary because his ideal society was fixed firmly in the past … utopian because it was basically a product of his imagination" (106). This is unfair: Cobbett's idealised visions of rural England are neither fixed in the past nor entirely imaginary. Rather, taking the material situation of the country labourer on the land as an absolute basis, Cobbett constructs a political sense of place which idealises *precisely* those characteristics that tend towards the tangible amelioration of the life of the rural labourer and small farmer. Such a Cobbettian sense of place persists, moreover, across the nineteenth century, finding expression, though in a significantly altered form, in the works of William Morris.

Section II: The Environments of Utopia in William Morris's *News from Nowhere*

William Cobbett's political sense of place is essentially a landscape sense – for Cobbett, places of political significance mostly take the form of a "view or prospect of natural inland scenery, such as can be taken in at a glance from one point of view; a piece of country scenery" ("landscape, n."). In other words,

Cobbett's places usually consist of a broad view or survey of a place, the place itself being relatively large in scale: a village, a series of hills, a town in a valley, a bare heath. Like Cobbett, William Morris makes use of a very particular sense of place in the construction of a political vision. Morris's places, however, are somewhat different: they are not only landscapes – though they sometimes are – but might instead be defined more generally with the word 'environment' – i.e. what environs or surrounds the subject.[20] Morris, in his writing as a whole, often refers specifically to surroundings as an important element in the life of the worker – a term which includes the urban, the architectural, the man-made and the interior, as well as the natural, the rural and the exterior – rather than a landscape, or any other term. In "How We Live & How We Might Live" (1884), Morris advances a series of claims for the ideal post-revolutionary life, the last of which is "that the material surroundings of my life should be pleasant, generous, and beautiful" (21). Likewise, in "Useful Work versus Useless Toil" (1884), Morris asserts that "there is another thing needed to make [labour] attractive, and that is pleasant surroundings" (114). Further still, in a lecture entitled "Art and Socialism" (1884), during the process of outlining the necessary conditions for ideal artistic production, Morris claims that "[t]he second necessity is decency of surroundings" (209). Importantly, Morris's surroundings constitute more than just a landscape, but rather refer more broadly to numerous and diverse types of place. Morris's sense of place – of 'surroundings' – consists of a multitude of dimensions, not reducible to any one mode. It is concerned with both the large and the small scale, consisting of both field and garden, urban and rural, landscape and architecture. This sense of place is reflected in Morris's utopian novel *News from Nowhere*, in which places take a variety of forms, beyond what can readily

[20] Although there has been a recent surge of critical interest in Morris as an early eco-socialist, I am here using the word 'environment' as I have defined it in the more literal sense, rather than in an ecological sense. For more on Morris as eco-socialist see Elizabeth Carolyn Miller's "William Morris, Extraction Capitalism, and the Aesthetics of Surface", as well as referenced essays by Bradley J. Macdonald, Paddy O'Sullivan, Tony Pinkney, Eddy Kent and Jed Mayer.

be called a 'landscape'. Further, places in *News* are articulated not only through how they appear in an all-encompassing view or prospect – the mode of perception through which a landscape is usually viewed – but also, as I will argue, through the experience of inhabiting and relating to them.

Another reason why 'landscape' is not quite the correct term to encapsulate Morris's places is that Morris's vision of Nowhere is as much architectural as it is topographical – as Mark Pearson notes, "*News from Nowhere* provides us with a distinct and independent account of the form that the built environment might take as a consequence of [Morris's] utopian vision" (137-138). Architecture figures heavily in the construction of the realm of Nowhere, and architectural specifics – style, scale, location, ornament, materials – are, as manifestations of Morris's political vision, vital to the construction of place in *News from Nowhere*. Built structures are not only features in a landscape, as they often are for Cobbett, but rather constitute environments in their own right, or at least figure as more than diminutive features in a larger scene.

It is for these reasons that, rather than simply analysing the landscapes in *News from Nowhere* – as I have done with Cobbett earlier in this chapter – I want to analyse its environments. It is abundantly clear that the notion of surroundings is an important one in Morris's imaginary, and in *News from Nowhere* Morris uses it to give expression to his political ideal. The term 'environment' – "[t]he area surrounding a place or thing; the environs, surroundings, or physical context" ("environment, n.") – serves to succinctly express this idea of surroundings, by which is meant the diverse and various types of place of which Nowhere is comprised, from the intimate to the expansive; from the natural to the architectural.

Fiona MacCarthy has written that "Morris had a sense of place so acute as to be almost a disability" (viii). Critics rightly point out that Morris's keen sense of place is, like Cobbett's, very often imbued with specifically *political* meaning, and acts, in various ways, as an expression of a political ideal (Laurent 55-58; Gilbert 30-33). Building on these arguments, I want to argue

that the highly subjective experience of place in Morris's utopian novel *News from Nowhere* actually articulates the fundamental change in individual affect which Morris hoped would be occasioned by a socialist revolution. William Cobbett, for his part, embarked on a process of observing precisely which elements of a particular already-existing place indicated the nature, health and scale of its rural economy and, through a process of geographical documentation, came to read into different places signs of England's political malaise, or the hopes for England's political renewal. For Cobbett, the material facts of the places which he observed constituted both the point of origin for and the final object of his political critique – he used already-existing landscapes as platforms from which to launch extended tirades against everything from paper money to enclosure, always finally returning, via that very critique, to the lot of the labourer on the specific piece of land upon which he stood. This is Cobbett's political sense of place: thoroughly materialist, highly specific and, vitally, interrogative rather than creative. As will be seen, Morris is very much a Cobbettian in this sense: for Cobbett and Morris alike, a specific political sense of place represents not just an incidental aspect of a much broader political vision but a key means by which the most fundamental ideals of such a vision might be articulated. Especially important to both Cobbett and Morris in this sense is the experience of everyday life for the worker, and the ways in which that experience is inextricably related to the experience of place.

It is mainly in *News from Nowhere* that Morris sets out his conception of the relationship between place and politics. Although Morris here engages, as Cobbett does in *Rural Rides*, in the process of making place political, he nonetheless does so in a way that is, importantly, different from Cobbett in certain respects. Indeed, in *News from Nowhere* Morris is both working in the tradition of Cobbett and at the same time expanding on and adapting that tradition. Morris takes the notion of place as an integral part of the political and makes use of that notion in a way which is, while markedly Cobbettian in some senses, nonetheless distinctly Morris's own. Essentially, Morris's aim in *News*

from Nowhere is to take a political vision and express it creatively through a vision of England renewed – through familiar places transfigured and related to in a radically different way. This political vision is, of course, a socialist one, but it is a specifically Morrisian socialism. Morris's environments are characterised by the experience of a kind of hyper-perceptiveness to the specifics of place, which is an intensely affective, usually joyful, often celebrative experience. This is because Morris's political vision itself is one based significantly on the prospect of an affective revolution: a fundamental change in the way in which people experience labour, the natural world and ultimately life itself. As Paul Meier argues in his biography of Morris, "*News from Nowhere* is an act of faith in the possibility of being happy" (1: 260). It was Morris's stated political aim "to set the true ideal of a full and reasonable life before [the worker], a life to which the perception and creation of beauty, the enjoyment of real pleasure that is, shall be felt to be as necessary to man as his daily bread" (Morris, "How I Became a Socialist" 281). By fashioning a vision of utopia in which the very stuff of the world – the physical environment of which it is composed – inspires an intense, palpable, immediate delight, as well as a sense of happiness, gladness and propriety, Morris was articulating in the most straightforward and exuberant way the possibilities that he believed lay dormant within the apparently familiar and dreary world of the nineteenth century. It is no accident that the mark of the final exile of William Guest, *News from Nowhere*'s protagonist, from the realm of Nowhere is a complete deprivation of a sense of place: "I saw as it were a black cloud rolling along to meet me, like a nightmare of my childish days; and for a while I was conscious of nothing else than being in the dark, and whether I was walking, or sitting, or lying down, I could not tell" (210).

An Affective Revolution

In order to understand the relevance of place in Morris's political vision, it is first necessary to understand the nature of the vision itself. Morris was not

always overtly political – his first concrete engagement with matters of this kind took place during his membership of the Eastern Question Association, a pressure group formed to resist Disraeli's alliance with Turkey against Russia (MacCarthy 378). This group was of a distinctly liberal character, and formed connections with, among others, William Gladstone, for whom Morris had a particular admiration at that time (384). By the time he had declared himself a socialist, however, Morris was committed not to mere piecemeal reform but to a fundamental change in the very structure of society. This was, of course, a position very different from Cobbett's, whose rallying cry was "[w]e want *great alteration*, but we want *nothing new*" ("To The Journeymen" 568). In "How We Live & How We Might Live", Morris makes his position abundantly clear. He explains that by the word "revolution" he means "a change in the basis of society." "[P]eople … beg that you will speak of reform and not revolution", Morris continues, "[a]s, however, we Socialists do not at all mean by our word revolution what these worthy people mean by their word reform, I can't help thinking that it would be a mistake to use it". "So", he concludes, "we will stick to our word … it may frighten people, but it will at least warn them that there is something to be frightened about" (3). Rather than a simple change of government, a new legislative agenda or an intellectual re-orientation, Morris's political vision is based around the desire for a complete and transformative change. Wholesale economic reform within existing structures is not enough: "as long as there is a privileged class in possession of the executive power, they will take good care that their economical position, which enables them to live on the unpaid labour of the people, is not tampered with". Morris believed that "true political freedom is impossible to people who are economically enslaved" ("The Hopes of Civilization" 71-72). An all-encompassing change in every major societal system – economic, social, industrial, affective – was necessary.

The society which Morris demanded such a complete departure from was, of course, that of nineteenth-century capitalism. Whereas Cobbett's criticism of the capitalistic agriculture of the early nineteenth century was

based mainly around its heedless destruction of whatever material and economic security the rural labourer may have possessed hitherto, Morris's ultimate objection to his own historical moment of late nineteenth-century capitalism is specifically its effect on the emotional, or the affective life of its subjects. In "Useful Work versus Useless Toil", Morris laments "our present joyless labour, and our lives scared and anxious as the life of a hunted beast" (112). In "Art and Socialism", Morris looks around at the society in which he lives and sees "[o]n one side ruinous and wearisome waste leading … on to complete cynicism at last, and the disintegration of all Society; and on the other side implacable oppression destructive of all pleasure and hope in life" (197). For Morris, nineteenth-century capitalism has a variety of pernicious effects, whether waste, corruption or oppression, but the ultimate evil which they unite to perpetrate is rooted in attitude and affect: cynicism on one side, the destruction of all pleasure and hope on the other. All aspects of industrial society unite to create a profound affective malaise: machines

> have been so used … that they have driven all men into mere frantic haste and hurry, thereby destroying pleasure, that is life, on all hands: they have instead of lightening the labour of the workmen, intensified it, and thereby added more weariness yet to the burden which the poor have to carry. ("Art and Socialism" 193)

Likewise, the "black horror and reckless squalor of our manufacturing districts" are "so dreadful to the senses which are unused to them that it is ominous for the future of the race that any man can live among it in tolerable cheerfulness" (207). Further still, the "profit-market … keeps us sweating and terrified for our livelihood" ("How We Live" 10). The very nature of labour itself serves to make the labourer miserable: "under our present system most *honest* men must lead unhappy lives, since their work, which is the most important part of their lives, is devoid of pleasure" ("The Socialist Ideal" 256). Even the middle classes, the supposed masters in the present state of things, have their affective capacities diminished by their position within capitalist society: they live a life "of ease and luxury … a life so empty, unwholesome and degraded, that perhaps, on the whole, [they are] worse off than we the workers are" ("How We Live" 10). The

ultimate horror of nineteenth century capitalism is, for Morris, not merely organisational inefficiency or economic inequality, nor is it the bare facts of a life lived in material poverty, as it often was for Cobbett, but the diminished and wretched affective state which it induces in those who live and work within it.

The radical transformation which Morris desired was articulated in response to these conditions. Morris himself was frank about the fact that he had no concrete proposals for the operation of his new society: “Some of you may expect me to say something about the machinery by which a communistic society is to be carried on. Well, I can say very little that is not merely negative” (“Communism” 275). Morris was, rather, much more concerned with articulating the broader possibilities which a post-revolutionary society entailed, and, through the opening up of imaginative space, he tried to advance the prospects of a radically transformed society operating along socialist lines. His most fervent hope was that the longed-for revolution would occasion a transformation of the nature of labour, which would ultimately and in turn lead to a revolution of an affective kind. This ‘affective revolution’ would be one in which the advent of true socialism would find its ultimate and most complete expression in the spheres of feeling and emotion: anxiety, weariness and cynicism would be replaced with contentment, pleasure and earnest fellow-feeling.

Uppermost in Morris’s post-revolutionary vision is a complete change in the nature of labour: its organisation, its allocation and, vitally, the act of labour itself. The collective labour of the whole would, firstly, be re-oriented away from the aims of the profit-market, which is based on fluctuating demand and supply, causing “overwork and weariness for the worker one month, and the next no work and terror of starvation” (“How We Live” 14). Instead labour would be regulated, “so that the supply and demand shall be genuine, not gambling; the two will then be commensurate, for it is the same society which demands that also supplies” (13). Goods produced would be “such goods as best fulfilled the real uses of the consumers”, the result being “steady work and plenty of leisure every month” (14). Morris proposes “[getting] the means of making

labour fruitful, the Capital, including the land, machinery, factories, &c., into the hands of the community, to be used for the good of all alike", the result being that "we might *all* work 'supplying' the real 'demands' of each and all" (emphasis added), and so "work for livelihood, instead of working to supply the demand of the profit market" ("Useful Work" 110). Essentially, as far as organisation of labour goes, Morris advocates a fairly standard Marxist position, that is, the seizure of the means of production, or the "[wresting], by degrees, [of] all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production" (Marx and Engels, "Manifesto" 504), with the "[e]qual liability of all to labour" (505). Morris carries this Marxist position along familiar lines, mirroring Marx and Engels's claim that a dominant proletariat would "increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible" (504), when he claims that "we shall then be relieved from the tax of waste, and consequently shall find that we have, as aforesaid, a mass of labour-power available" ("Useful Work" 110).

Where Morris begins to develop the standard Marxist line is in his conception of the effects of this re-organisation of labour on the life of the labouring individual (which would, of course, be every individual). Labour having been re-organised and re-aligned such that the material needs of each member of society would, in Morris's conception, be entirely catered for, "we shall have time to look round and consider what we really do want". Morris sets out the argument that what would be possible in this state of affairs – indeed, what would be necessary – is the transformation of the nature of work itself: "all labour, even the commonest, must be made attractive" (111). Such a transformation of work into an object of attraction would be achieved through emphasising a number of vital aspects of labour. The first is the "element of obvious usefulness" in any piece of work, which would "[sweeten] tasks otherwise irksome, since social morality, the responsibility of man towards the life of man, will, in the new order of things, take the place of theological morality, or the responsibility of man to some abstract idea". Second is the insistence that "the day's work will be short". Third is the "[v]ariety of work":

Morris argues that "[t]o compel a man to do day after day the same task, without any hope of escape or change, means nothing short of turning his life into a prison-torment." Therefore, in a post-revolutionary society, Morris asserts, "[a] man might easily learn and practise at least three crafts, varying sedentary occupation with outdoor" (112). The fourth and final change would be the performance of labour in "pleasant surroundings". For Morris, "all our crowded towns and bewildering factories are simply the outcome of the profit system" (114). "There is no reason", he continues, "why [people] should not follow their occupations in quiet country homes, in industrial colleges, in small towns, or, in short, where they find it happiest for them to live." As for "that part of labour which must be associated on a large scale, this very factory system … would at least offer opportunities for a full and eager social life surrounded by many pleasures" (115).

Through this transformation of the very nature of labour itself, Morris sees the emergence of a change within each individual at the fundamental level of affect. In his lecture "Dawn of a New Epoch" (1886), Morris writes, "Let us be *fellows* working in the harmony of association for the common good, that is, for the greatest happiness and completest development of every human being in the community" (123). The transformed conditions of labour are the means by which a larger emotional transformation will be attained, from anxiety to contentment; from misery to well-being. The ultimate goal for Morris is not merely improved efficiency or increased productive capacity; rather it is to bring about the conditions in which each individual can experience their life in a joyful, happy, contented way.

The ideal affective states which Morris specifies as part of his affective transformation are the total inverse of those which characterise the nineteenth century: cynicism, haste, alienation, fear and misery. Against cynicism there is hope: "hope of rest, hope of product, hope of pleasure" (99). Against haste there is calm and thoughtfulness (108), against alienation there is "the harmony of association" ("Dawn of a New Epoch" 123) and "That true society … of reasonable people conscious of the aspirations of humanity and the

duties we owe to it through one another" ("True and False Society" 237). Against fear there is the prospect of an "unanxious life" ("How I Became a Socialist" 281), and against misery there is "the pleasure of life" ("The Aims of Art" 93). Indeed, the word "pleasure" is one which Morris uses with extraordinary frequency, and as a concept it encapsulates the affective revolution which Morris looked to. Fundamentally, Morris conceived of an existence in which all material needs are met, in which all anxieties – barring natural accident and the ineradicable facts of human jealousy, anger and sexual desire – are allayed, and in which the prospect of labour provides purpose, satisfaction and enjoyment. All these elements in combination achieve the ultimate aim of Morris's political project, which he states twice in repetition towards the end of "Useful Work versus Useless Toil": to bring about the conditions which allow each person to "live and work in hope and with pleasure" (119).

William Cobbett's political outlook was substantially different from Morris's – indeed, as I will argue in the following chapter, it is difficult to find in any of Cobbett's work a coherent and comprehensive vision of the future. Despite their political differences concerning the articulation of the society to come, however, Cobbett and Morris are united in their relation of the life of the working individual to a particular sense of place. As we have seen, Cobbett relates certain aspects of any given landscape to the material well-being of its labouring inhabitants, judging those aspects accordingly and in doing so arriving at a political sense of place. Like Cobbett, Morris is concerned above all with the specifics of everyday working life – especially, in his case, its affective dimensions – and his political sense of place could not exist without this vital factor. In a broader sense, however, Morris's conception of the relation between politics and place differs from Cobbett's: where Cobbett surveys already existing landscapes and, through interrogation and interpretation, makes them political, Morris – thinking in a broader environmental sense – takes familiar places and projects onto them an added imaginative dimension, which serves as a manifestation of his political project.

These imaginatively transformed places are, further, experienced via the medium of an altered perception – one facilitated by the transformation itself. In other words, a vital aspect of Morris's vision of a renewal of pleasure in working life is a transformed experience of the world more broadly, or the renewal of a sense of pleasure in place. This transformation is characterised by an intimacy with and intense delight in one's surroundings, which themselves are organised not by the demands of industry or profit, but for convenience and pleasure – which are, in other words, reflective of the re-organisation of society. As I have argued, the notion of "surroundings" is very important to Morris in his vision of a post-revolutionary society, an essential element of which is "that the material surroundings of my life should be pleasant, generous, and beautiful" ("How We Live" 21). "When [the people] are no longer slaves", Morris argues,

> they will claim as a matter of course that every man and every family should be generously lodged; that every child should be able to play in a garden close to the place his parents live in; that the houses should by their obvious decency and order be ornaments to Nature, not disfigurements of it. (22)

The architectural or built environment will be organised along the lines of domestic convenience – of the desires and needs of the individual or family, rather than the necessities of the housing and rental markets. Importantly, architecture maintains a fidelity to nature – that is, to what Morris considered to be nature: "The sunlight, the fresh air, the unspoiled face of the earth" ("Useful Work" 103), or, to be more precise, that which exists in the world which is not explicitly constructed or formed by the action of humanity (though it may be organised by humanity, as in the case of a field or a planted forest): topography, plants, flowers, weather. Both these elements – the architectural and the natural – go together to form Morris's ideal environments. Just as a dwelling place should, in Morris's ideal society, be "pleasant, generous, and beautiful" – that is, productive of a feeling of pleasure – so too should the natural world. One of the shortcomings of nineteenth-century capitalism in Morris's view was that it left one "unable to … have pleasant fields to walk in,

or to lie in the sun" ("How We Live" 10). Thus one of Morris's 'claims' for socialism is the right "[t]o feel mere life a pleasure; to enjoy the moving one's limbs and exercising one's bodily powers; to play, as it were, with sun and wind and rain" (17). A part of the idea of pleasure – Morris's ultimate aim – is a visceral, immediate engagement with the natural world.[21] Likewise, in "Useful Work versus Useless Toil", Morris suggests the idea that "the earth nourish us all alike … the sun shine for all of us alike … to one and all of us the glorious drama of the earth – day and night, summer and winter – can be presented as a thing to understand and love" (116). Morris presents a vision of nature as a great equaliser, or as a collective pleasure and resource, which, through its renewed universality, inspires love. In these ways, then, through the habitation and appreciation of beautiful, pleasing and delightful places, Morris's ideal society would engender a new sense of place – one rooted in pleasure, satisfaction, affection and joy.

In *News from Nowhere*, just such a renewed sense of place is abundantly evident amongst the characters, as well as the narrator, William Guest. The characters' experience of their environments in *News from Nowhere* is one frequently characterised by an intensely pleasurable affective relation to place, in accordance with Morris's wider political project, which is to claim the affective life of each member of society as the primary object of change in a post-revolutionary society.

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[21] As Jan Marsh has shown in her book *Back to the Land*, Morris was by no means alone in placing a distinct emphasis on a sense of closeness with nature as something inherently opposed to the various debilitating effects of late nineteenth-century life. It should be noted, however, that the various movements, communes, guilds and garden city-builders which Marsh examines usually conceived of a return to rural life as a *means* to escape the unpleasant reality of the present, whereas for Morris – the committed Marxist – it was instead to be a *product* of a truly fulfilled post-revolutionary life.

A Renewed Sense of Place

Morris's *News from Nowhere* sets out an imagined future in which society has been transformed both in terms of individual human relations and in terms of larger economic, ecological and industrial structures: from a society of misery and alienation to one of communality, pleasure and rest. In many ways, the novel's narrator William Guest experiences the land of Nowhere in much the same way that William Cobbett experiences rural England – he traverses its landscapes, observes its buildings and speaks to its inhabitants. Indeed, in this sense, Morris's political sense of place is very much like Cobbett's: as will be seen, both are conducting a kind of survey in their texts, in which the political is gradually revealed through an extended act of attentive travel.

The difference between Cobbett and Morris in this respect is that Morris's Nowhere is at least partially *invented*, in order to illustrate his own particular political vision. Nowhere is, in other words, a utopia. The notion of utopia is, of course, complex and multifaceted, as Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel have noted: utopia, in their argument, can mean "a literary genre, a constitution for a perfectly restructured polity, a state of mind, the religious or scientific foundations of a universal republic" (4). Insofar as it is a novel portraying a harmonious world of happiness and pleasure resulting explicitly from the eventual victory of socialist organisation and the full realisation of communism as a social and economic system, *News from Nowhere* is certainly all of these in some sense. But Morris's novel also represents a "distinct [line]" of utopian thought which Fredric Jameson identifies in his book *Archaeologies of the Future*, one which is "intent on the realization of the Utopian program", and which "will include revolutionary political practice, when it aims at founding a whole new society, alongside written exercises in the literary genre" (3). At the very end of *News from Nowhere*, Guest, having returned to the nineteenth century, declares that his short dwelling in the realm of Nowhere "may be called a vision rather than a dream" (211). The term "vision" is vital to understanding the nature of Morris's utopia: through an in-depth portrayal of

the society of Nowhere – its manners, its economic arrangements, its landscapes, its architecture, its history – Morris was attempting to articulate the core values of his socialist political project and to show how those values might actually be realised in a material sense. Morris's ultimate aim in this endeavour is to demonstrate in a highly lucid fashion the very real potential for revolutionary action in his own present. As E. P. Thompson argued in his seminal biography of Morris, "*News from Nowhere* must not be, and was never intended to be, read as a literal picture of Communist society. One half of its purpose is a criticism of capitalist society, the other half a revelation of the powers slumbering within men and women and distorted or denied in class society" (696). Rather than sober prophecy, wistful daydreaming or dogmatic mass-instruction, Morris's aim in *News from Nowhere* is to create a vivid picture of the various transformations he hoped a transition to a socialist society would bring about, taking them out of the realm of abstract aspiration and into the realm of material tangibility.

Certainly, the affective revolution which Morris seems to anticipate as part of the transition to socialism is very much present amongst the people of Nowhere, who exhibit a picture of joy and contentment in abundance as Guest encounters them on his travels. Indeed, *News from Nowhere* is subtitled "An Epoch of Rest", but it might as easily be subtitled 'An Epoch of Pleasure'. Just as William Cobbett, ranging across the agricultural lands of England in his *Rural Rides*, would stop to assess the state of the labourers which he saw at each place he visited, so now the character of Guest pauses to examine the inhabitants of Nowhere. Riding down what was once King Street, Guest observes the character of the Nowherians in a thoroughly Cobbettian manner: "Some faces I saw that were thoughtful, and in these I noticed great nobility of expression, but none that had a glimmer of unhappiness, and the greater part (we came upon a good many people) were frankly and openly joyous" (23). This affective revolution is, further, shown to have been occasioned by precisely that political change which Morris anticipated: the transformation of work. Old Hammond, speaking with Guest at Bloomsbury Market, tells Guest

that "'we have now found out what we want, so we make no more than we want; and as we are not driven to make a vast quantity of useless things, we have time and resources enough to consider our pleasure in making them." He goes on to say that "under these circumstances all the work that we do is an exercise of the mind and body more or less pleasant to be done: so that instead of avoiding work everybody seeks it" (97). Labour has, in other words, been transformed precisely along the lines which Morris articulated in essays such as "Useful Work versus Useless Toil", emphasising usefulness and pleasure in the work itself, as well as how that work is organised. This transformation is shown, in Nowhere, to lead to affective change: to the advent of a general mood of happiness and joviality. A short while after their journey down King Street, in another Cobbettian vignette, Guest and his companion come upon a "gang of men road-mending",[22] which Guest takes an interest in as an example of people "set to on a piece of real necessary work". Though they appear to be hard at work, they are nonetheless "laughing and talking merrily". Moving out of the road to allow Guest to pass, "like men with a pleasant task on hand, [they hurry] back to their work, only stopping to give us a smiling good-day". The road-menders are labouring under conditions of abundance, sociability and happy exertion – they have a "good big basket" waiting for them which has "hints about it of cold pie and wine", they relate to one another as equals, with friendly joviality, and, as Dick remarks, they take pleasure in the exercise which their work brings: "it's right down good sport trying how much pick-work one can get into an hour" (47). All this conspires, in Morris's picture of an ideal society at work, to instil in the people at large an aura of happiness and pleasure in life itself.

Environments are a vital part of the picture of Nowhere, partly because they express a striking realisation of that utopia, and partly because they relate

[22] As Owen Holland has pointed out (136-137), this incident bears a remarkable similarity to John Ruskin's ill-fated attempt in 1874 to convince a number of his students at Oxford to engage in building a road between two nearby villages, in an effort to do, in the words of Oscar Wilde (who was among the group of students) "something that would do good to other people" (Wilde 193-19).

Nowhere to somewhere – to Morris's England, or the banks of the Thames (whether city or country) as they were in the nineteenth century. Peter Faulkner writes of *News from Nowhere* that "the geographical exactness of it all ties down the fantastic elements to a reality which is already known … Nowhere is England reborn" (*Against the Age* 134). Indeed, Morris is at pains to ensure that Nowhere maps directly on to the Thames-side of the nineteenth century. But rather than "reborn" – washed clean, free of the burden of the past, a blank slate – Nowhere might be better characterised as England overwritten. The past is never erased, only built upon. England in *News from Nowhere* is a palimpsest, with the evidence of history – history which, for the inhabitants of Nowhere is long past, but which for Morris's readers was a living reality – inherent in the landscape itself. Just as Cobbett was careful to name almost every place he arrived at or travelled through, so throughout *News from Nowhere* the environments inhabited or traversed by William Guest are explicitly related to genuine, named locations which would have been familiar to many of Morris's readers (especially those residing in or about London). Fredric Jameson has remarked that "the city itself [is] a fundamental form of the Utopian image" (4) – in *News from Nowhere*, the semi-present skeleton of the old nineteenth-century city of London is used to articulate a utopian vision in which the very presence of cities in a traditional sense is done away with altogether, suggesting the potential for radical change within the apparently immutable structures of nineteenth-century life. The first thing Guest sees when he emerges from his bedroom into Nowhere is "the familiar face of the Thames" (6). Immediately afterwards, a series of London locations are explicitly referenced as still very much existing: Chiswick, Putney, Barn Elms (7). A little further on, Guest is taken through King Street, now "wide sunny meadows and garden-like tillage" (23), where, importantly, spatial markers of the 'old' nineteenth century King Street still remain: "I thought I knew the Broadway by the lie of the roads that still met there" (24). Recognisable London buildings still exist, including the British Museum (50), St. Paul's Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament, the latter of which, in Morris's bitter anti-

parliamentary joke, has been transformed into a “storage place for manure.” These buildings are kept standing by the inhabitants of Nowhere “as a kind of foil to the beautiful ones which we build now” (32) – explicit architectural symbols of the presence of the past (Morris’s present) within Nowhere’s idyll. The wealthy borough of Kensington is now a forest – a “wild spot”, frequented by naturalists, running “northward and west right over Paddington and a little way down Notting Hill: thence it runs north-east to Primrose Hill” (26). Further up the Thames, when Guest travels into the countryside, visiting familiar places like Hampton Court (145-146) and Oxford (185), the similarities between the England he knew and the Nowhere he inhabits again strike him:

> As we went higher up the river, there was less difference between the Thames of that day and the Thames as I remembered it; for setting aside the hideous vulgarity of the cockney villas of the well-to-do, stockbrokers and other such, which in older time marred the beauty of the bough-hung banks, even this beginning of the country Thames was always beautiful… (144)

Perhaps the most striking example, however, of Nowhere’s palimpsestic environments is the moment in which Guest is taken through Trafalgar Square. At first, he does not recognise the place, due to its having been transformed into a miniature bucolic paradise: “We came presently into a large open space … the sunny site of which had been taken advantage of for planting an orchard, mainly, as I could see, of apricot-trees, in the midst of which was a pretty gay little structure of wood, painted and gilded”. As he shuts his eyes “to keep out the sight of the sun glittering on this fair abode of gardens”, however, he sees “a phantasmagoria of another day”: “A great space surrounded by tall ugly houses, with an ugly church at the corner and a nondescript ugly cupolaed building at my back; the roadway thronged with a sweltering and excited crowd, dominated by omnibuses crowded with spectators” (41). He is remembering the events of Bloody Sunday in 1887, with the square itself “guarded up to the edge of the roadway by a four-fold line of big men clad in blue, and across the southern roadway the helmets of a band of horse-soldiers, dead white in the greyness of the chilly November afternoon” (41-42). Guest’s clear memory of this site of struggle and oppression leads

him to understand where he is: “I opened my eyes to the sunlight again and looked round me, and cried out among the whispering trees and odorous blossoms, ‘Trafalgar Square!’” (42). Amidst superabundant natural beauty, the localities of Nowhere still hold within themselves the traces of their past, and to dwell within them, or to pass through them, is to stand at an intersection between the familiar and the revolutionary.[23] John Rignall writes of Walter Scott that “in his scenic descriptions … Scott can quietly suggest the historical sedimentation of the English landscape and draw attention to the long continuity of human presence and activity” (102). Morris – an ardent admirer of Scott since his childhood (MacCarthy 6) – extends this process into his own future, suggesting the possibility of new, revolutionary presences and activities within the landscape of England.

In one sense, Morris approaches Cobbett’s sense of place in these scenes: he begins with already-existing places, into which he then reads political significance. Like Cobbett, Morris begins with what is *actually* around him – in Cobbett’s case, the downs, fields and meadows of England’s rural South, in Morris’s case the city of London and the banks of the Thames as they extend towards and beyond Oxford – and tries to conceive of it politically, beyond immediate appearances. But it is in the imaginative and transformative results of this initial act of surveying that Morris differs from Cobbett. The significance of *News from Nowhere*’s historicised localities for Morris’s political imaginary lies in the fact that they represent the potential for radical change within the everyday. Whereas Cobbett’s political sense of place was based on the assessment and interpretation of already-existing places, Morris’s is

[23] Kristin Ross, in her book *Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune*, draws parallels between Morris’s imaginative act of spatial re-envisioning in Trafalgar Square and the actions of the Paris Communards. The Communards’ demolition of the Vendôme Column in 1871, Ross argues, was a “[reiteration of] the empty space of potentiality”. Morris, Ross goes on to say, “goes one step further and creates a new space/time of seasonal rhythms and luxurious bounty” (60-61). In other words, not only does Morris expose the abundance of possibility present within the apparently immutable spatial environment of nineteenth century capitalism, he also asserts a positive transformative vision which arises out of that possibility.

concerned with taking those already-existing places and emphasising their mutability – and therefore the mutability of society as a whole – through imaginative reconfiguration. The realm of Nowhere is a utopia, but it is a utopia rooted firmly in nineteenth-century England. By mapping the extraordinary directly on to the ordinary, Morris is attempting to articulate, through a depiction of a network of places, landscapes and surroundings, a sense of those "powers slumbering within men and women" which E. P. Thompson speaks of in his biography of Morris. The contrasts between nineteenth-century environment and Nowherian environment are vivid and deliberate: thoroughfares become woodlands, busy public squares become orchards, wealthy districts of opulent houses become wild woods. Importantly, however, the roads and place-names remain more or less unchanged. The overarching geographical and topographical structures which make up nineteenth century England remain much as they were – the Thames in Nowhere leads from London to Oxford and onwards, just as the Thames in nineteenth century England does – but the nature of the environments themselves *within* those structures is radically mutable. The broader implication is meant for the nineteenth century reader – indeed, before its publication as a book in 1890, *News from Nowhere* was serialized in the socialist newspaper *Commonweal* (1885-1894), the official newspaper of the Socialist League, of which Morris was the chief editorial writer and poet. The primary audience of the *Commonweal* was intended to be labouring city-dwellers: residents not just of London but also of "Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Preston", and wherever else "potential readers lay" (MacCarthy 514). At the end of *News from Nowhere*, Guest reads into the last moments of his vision of Nowhere a message that "in spite of all the infallible maxims of your day there is yet a time of rest in store for the world, when mastery has changed into fellowship" (210). Nowhere's de-familiarised familiar places offer the same message: in amongst the dingy, ugly places of nineteenth century London – "so desperately shabby,

so irredeemably vulgar" (Morris, "Ugly London" 1) – there is the potential for a garden to grow.[24]

The question then becomes that of the garden itself, and how Morris's environments are *experienced*. Indeed, as will be seen, the actual subjective experience of place – as opposed to its mere portrayal in a more abstract or distant sense – is as vital an element in the construction of a political vision for Morris as it is for William Cobbett. Upon waking up in Nowhere at the beginning of *News*, the first thing Guest does is go for a swim in the Thames: "Withal I felt dizzy and queer; and remembering that people often got a boat and had a swim in mid-stream, I thought I would do no less" (6). Guest's entry into Nowhere is marked by an act of immersion, an explicitly bodily interaction with his surroundings. Immediately following this symbolic baptism into the world of Nowhere, Guest's perceptive faculties are renewed, as though his bodily embrace of the river occasions the beginning of the profound affective transformation which Guest is to undergo during the course of his time in Nowhere:

> and as … I had my clothes off, I jumped in without more ado. Of course, when I had my head above water again I turned towards the tide, and my eyes naturally sought for the bridge, and so utterly astonished was I by what I saw, that I forgot to strike out, and went spluttering under water again, and when I came up I went straight for the boat … so bewildering had been the half-sight I had seen from the face of the river with the water hardly out of my eyes; though by this time I was quit of the slumbrous and dizzy feeling, and was wide-awake and clear-headed. (6-7)

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[24] For Marcus Waithe, in his book *William Morris's Utopia of Strangers* (2006), it is precisely the abundant, teeming gardens and "wild spots" of Nowhere which act as a method of "symbolizing complexity", and which are symbolic of a Nowherian "determination to reserve space for growth, whilst renouncing the aim of total knowledge". Waithe applies this observation to his overall object of discussion, which is the question of the politics of hospitality in Morris's work, as well as his supposed rejection of a closed, static utopia in favour of "something more accommodating to diversity" (146). Though Waithe by no means rejects the notion that Morris's utopia is a distinctly open one, able to accommodate dissent and difference, he is nonetheless concerned to point out the implicit limits and strictures which such ostensible openness disguises (142-170).

From slumberousness and dizziness – that is, from an inability to properly exercise the faculties of perception, and thus from a disconnect from his immediate environment – Guest emerges into clarity and alertness, and so, implicitly, a new receptiveness to place.

The inhabitants of Nowhere exhibit an attitude towards the arrangement of their environment which is entirely at odds with Morris's conception of the nineteenth-century norm. Morris believed that "all our crowded towns and bewildering factories are simply the outcome of the profit system." His claim was that "[c]apitalistic manufacture, capitalistic land-owning, and capitalistic exchange force men into big cities in order to manipulate them in the interests of capital" ("Useful Work" 115). Morris's argument was, in other words, that the organisation and arrangement of space was conducted predominantly along the lines of profit, manufacture and commerce, which were responsible for both the overcrowded, dirty towns, and "in the open country itself the thrusting aside by miserable jerry-built brick and slate of the solid grey dwellings that are still scattered about" ("Art and Socialism" 207). In distinct contrast to this state of affairs, the inhabitants of Nowhere organise and construct space based on desire, convenience and aesthetic appeal, an attitude encapsulated in Hammond's response to Guest when he asks why the Nowherians choose to preserve wastes and forests: "'we like these pieces of wild nature, and can afford them, so we have them'" (74). This apparently innocuous statement, revealing in its simplicity, perfectly sums up the Nowherian attitude to the organisation of place: if a thing is both desirable and possible, then it is done. Vanished are the issues of ownership and property – places exist and are configured "for the pleasure as well as the livelihood of all" (191).

One of the ways in which the inhabitants of Nowhere take it upon themselves to re-configure the places in which they live and work is through a renewed architecture, reflective of Morris's claim in "Useful Work versus Useless Toil" that in a post-revolutionary society the "glorious art of architecture, now for some time slain by commercial greed, would be born again and flourish" (116). Though Cobbett does have an eye for the medieval

Gothic – an aspect of his sense of place which, as I will explain in the following chapter, is ultimately more relevant to Morris's conception of history than of place – nonetheless his sense of place is not as specifically architectural as Morris's. Cobbett usually includes buildings as minor elements in a larger landscape picture, whereas Morris has a much keener and more developed architectural sense. Shortly after Guest's baptismal induction into Nowhere, he lingers a while to contemplate the Guest House which stands on the site of his old nineteenth-century home. Morris is careful to articulate the architectural particulars of this structure: it is a "longish building with its gable ends turned away from the road, and long traceried windows coming rather low down set in the wall … very handsomely built of red brick with a lead roof", with a "frieze of figure subjects in baked clay, very well executed" above the windows, designed with a "force and directness" (13). Inside, Guest finds himself "standing in a hall with a floor of marble mosaic and an open timber roof". There are "no windows on the side opposite to the river, but arches below leading into chambers", one showing "a glimpse of a garden beyond", above which is a "long space of wall gaily painted" (14). This building is particularly reflective of Morris's architectural tastes – the length of the building, as well as its open timber roof and the fact of its gables being turned away from the road, are suggestive of Great Coxwell Barn, near Kelmscott in Oxfordshire, a well-known example of thirteenth century secular architecture which Morris called "as noble as a cathedral" (qtd. in Pevsner, *Buildings of England* 147). The marble mosaic, traceried windows, arches and ornament, meanwhile, are all hallmarks of Gothic architecture, which Morris saw as the architecture of "harmonious freedom", specifically of the "freedom of hand and mind subordinated to the co-operative harmony which made … freedom possible" ("Gothic Architecture" 276). While the architectural detail might be a reflection of Morris's own tastes, however, the point of importance is that Nowhere is a society which pays attention to architectural specifics even in its domestic architecture, as part of its effort to create a pleasing environment, an attitude which presents a polar opposite to the domestic architecture of the nineteenth

century. In reference to the Peterborough of his day, for example, Morris deplored the “wilderness of small, dull houses built of a sickly-coloured yellow brick” (“Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century” 375), while in the “ugliness” of “the shops and dwellings of the bourgeoisie, middle and upper” which were to be found in late-Victorian London, Morris saw “something soul-deadening” (“Ugly London” 1). Specific conceptions of beauty aside, the point of significance is that when considering the nature of the places which they inhabit, beauty as a concept in-and-of-itself, without any reference to utility beyond the production of pleasure, is of the utmost importance to the inhabitants of Nowhere.

The second point to be made regarding the Hammersmith Guest House is the affective state which it inspires. The building represents the transformed sense of place which the changed condition of society – manifested in the re-figured environment – has brought about. Everything about the place is “handsome and generously solid as to material”, and these environmental characteristics give rise to “an exhilarating sense of space and freedom”. “Freedom” is the important concept here – through an environment configured along the lines of pleasure as well as of utility and convenience, Guest experiences an altered affective state: a feeling of freedom, or liberation. Importantly, this pleasurable affective relation to his immediate environment is bound up with a general affective shift: Guest is able to experience a sense of freedom in the architecture because he is able to become, as a temporary inhabitant of Nowhere, “an unanxious man who is in the habit of using his eyes” (14). In other words, because Guest is “unanxious” – because he is suffused with that general sense of wellbeing which pervades the society of Nowhere – he is able to observe and interpret more closely the environment in which he finds himself, and so, through this intimacy with his surroundings, draw from it a feeling of freedom.

Architecture, of course, is not only an inhabited space – it is also seen from afar, as a distant object, or part of a landscape. In this sense, too, the experience of place in Nowhere is one focussed predominantly, though not

exclusively, around pleasure. Shortly after leaving the Guest House, Guest and his guide come across “a range of buildings and courts, low, but very handsomely built and ornamented, and in that way forming a great contrast to the unpretentiousness of the houses round about”. Above these, meanwhile, there rise “the steep lead-covered roof and the buttresses and higher part of the wall of a great hall, of a splendid and exuberant style of architecture” which seems to “embrace the best qualities of the Gothic of northern Europe with those of the Saracenic and Byzantine”. Across the road is an “octagonal building with a high roof, not unlike the Baptistry at Florence in outline” which is “also … most delicately ornamented”. This “whole mass of architecture” is situated “amidst the pleasant fields” (24). The architectural diversity here draws attention once more to the evident importance placed by the Nowherians on architecture as an art form in its own right, and as a way of embellishing and beautifying a place. Their embrace of a diversity of styles, as well as their execution of them in what Morris regards as a correct way, suggests an attention to pleasurable detail amidst everyday life in a similar way that the Guest House does. Another important aspect of this architectural assemblage is its existence as an ensemble, with each diverse element interacting harmoniously with the whole. Each building or type of building sits in concordant relation with its neighbour – small-scale dwellings exist in pleasing contrast with grand monumental buildings, a reminder that utility and aesthetic appeal need not be at odds in Nowhere, but rather that a direct appeal to an obvious purpose can exist as part of an aesthetically pleasing whole. The environment is arranged according to pleasure in all senses of the word. Furthermore, it is, evidently, not only one’s immediate surroundings, but also the larger environment experienced as an interconnected whole – in a topographical as well as a visual sense – which is of importance to the inhabitants of Nowhere when configuring their surroundings.

This pleasing assemblage again inspires an affective response in Guest, as well as in his friend: “it bore upon it the expression of such generosity and abundance of life that I was exhilarated to a pitch that I had never yet

reached. I fairly chuckled for pleasure. My friend seemed to understand it, and sat looking on me with a pleased and affectionate interest" (24). The buildings themselves are expressive of such characteristics as to cause both Guest and his companion pleasure, which Guest even goes so far as to express outwardly through laughter. The environment is again configured with such an overriding attention to pleasure – though in this instance on a larger, more expansive scale – that it seems to Guest that the very property of abundance is inherent within it. The sense of place which the inhabitants of Nowhere exhibit when occupying, viewing and traversing their own environments is one of acute perceptiveness and delight – perceptiveness because they are able to survey their environment with a keen eye for detail and mood which engenders a powerfully felt response, and delight because that response is most often one of palpable and ebullient satisfaction.

It is not only the architectural – whether on a small or large scale – which constitutes the environments of Nowhere; so too does the natural, that is, the natural according to Morris. In the realm of Nowhere, there is an intoxicating superabundance of natural beauty. Recently, Owen Holland has commented on this "pastoral" emphasis, arguing that it was in large part a practical move to maximise the emotional and intellectual impact of his own depiction of utopia on the late-Victorian socialist reading public: "the 'pastoral' character of Guest's dream-vision might … be productively thought of … as a manifestation of Morris's understanding that the pastoral impulse constituted an influential structure of feeling amongst his readership and wider audience of fellow travellers" (121). For Holland, Morris's Arcadian utopianism in *News from Nowhere* represents "a propagandistic attempt to appropriate elements of contemporary literary and radical culture" (122). In making this argument, however, Holland misses the ways in which Nowhere's intensely beautiful and delightful natural environments can act as much more than mere "[functionalisations of] the device of pastoral return as a potential agent of politicisation" (165), instead working, in a less straightforwardly practical sense, as vivid *articulations* of Morris's political vision. This represents another

highly Cobbettian aspect of Morris's writing: like Cobbett, Morris conceives of the experience of natural places – that is, natural as I have defined the term above – as a vital constitutive element of any political vision, rather than as a mere picturesque *accoutrement* or Arcadian propaganda ploy.

Those who inhabit Nowhere have an intensely receptive, joyous and pleasurable relationship with the natural as much as the built environment[25] – and so it is in the garden of a small house near Hampton Court:

> We could see even under the doubtful light of the moon and the last of the western glow that the garden was stuffed full of flowers; and the fragrance it gave out in the gathering coolness was so wonderfully sweet, that it seemed the very heart of the delight of the June dusk; so that we three stopped instinctively, and Clara gave forth a little sweet 'Oh', like a bird beginning to sing. (147)

Here, it is the character Clara who exemplifies the renewed relationship with environment that pervades life in Nowhere. The way in which she experiences her environment is portrayed by Morris through the medium of smell – a particularly immediate sense. By emphasising smell as a way of engaging with place, Morris demonstrates the possibility of perceiving and interpreting an environment with a profound sense of intimacy – an intimacy which is precisely a product of its pleasurableness. The garden, abundant with flowers, is an environment configured primarily for enjoyment, and especially the enjoyment of the natural. This arrangement allows Clara to engage with it in a way which engenders an affective response: she "[gives] forth a little sweet 'Oh'". While not as explicitly affective as previous examples – specific emotional states are not named – this utterance demonstrates a response to an environment capable of evoking a physical exclamation. In the context of her subsequent

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[25] As Owen Holland points out, contemporary reviewers of *News from Nowhere* – many of whom were either indifferent or actively hostile towards socialism – were keen to emphasise the text's Arcadian qualities in order to align it with the more familiar and acceptable genre of the pastoral, "[accentuating] the 'idyllic' in order to occlude Morris's uncomfortable depiction of, and commitment to, social revolution" (111).

remark – "'how sweet, how sweet it is!'" (147) – it is difficult to interpret this exclamation as anything other than one of delight or pleasure.

Another scene, this time at Kelmscott, presents an intensification of the scene at Hampton Court. Guest is in the garden of Kelmscott Manor with another companion, Ellen:

> My companion gave a sigh of pleased surprise and enjoyment; nor did I wonder, for the garden between the wall and the house was redolent of the June flowers, and the roses were rolling over one another with that delicious super-abundance of small well-tended gardens which at first sight takes away all thought from the beholder save that of beauty. The blackbirds were singing their loudest, the doves were cooing on the roof-ridge, the rooks in the high elm-trees beyond were garrulous among the young leaves, and the swifts wheeled whining about the gables. And the house itself was a fit guardian for all the beauty of this heart of summer. (201)

This passage – which occurs towards the end of the text – has the quality of a crescendo about it. There is a sense of delirious hyper-awareness, or of exaggerated perception, in the depiction of environment. Again, smell is important: the environment as a whole overflows with sensory phenomena, appealing directly to that most immediate of perceptive faculties. The roses grow with such lavish profusion that they appeal not only to sight but, in a kind of overwhelmed sensory confusion, to the faculty of taste. Indeed, they are even capable of momentarily crowding out rational thought with the strength of their visual appeal. The various birds, meanwhile – equally an element of environment here – become a delightfully cacophonous ensemble. The way environment is perceived in this passage is vividly demonstrative of the Nowherian sense of place: alert, unmediated, hyper-perceptive. Vitally, it can only be interpreted in this way due to its arrangement by the inhabitants of Nowhere themselves: Ellen remarks that "'I do not wonder at our friends tending it carefully and making much of it'". "'It seems to me'", she goes on, "'as if it had waited for these happy days'" (201) – in other words, it is an environment which is profoundly reflective of the political epoch – the epoch of pleasure – in which it now exists. This suffusion of the environment with a

sense of pleasure and delight, which itself represents Morris's ultimate political ideal, engenders, again, a renewed perception of place.

The above depiction of the garden at Kelmscott Manor begins with the expression of an affective state – of a mood of "pleased surprise and enjoyment" – and is also closed with one: "[Ellen] led me up close to the house, and laid her shapely sun browned hand and arm on the lichened wall as if to embrace it, and cried out, 'Oh me! Oh me! How I love the earth, and the seasons, and weather, and all things that deal with it, and all that grows out of it, - as this has done!'" (201-202). Here is an explicit depiction of the Nowherian sense of place: Ellen relates to her environment as though it were a human presence, physically embracing it, expressing a feeling of palpable affection towards it. She exclaims "'Oh me!'" twice in repetition, as though temporarily unable to articulate the strength of her feeling. Finally, she expresses with untrammelled exuberance how she relates to the environment – both on a large and a small scale, referring both to an individual object and to the various phenomena associated with the broader experience of place – in terms which are primarily affective. Her relation to the environment which surrounds her is so immediate and intense that she is moved to feelings of unabashed love.

All these incidences of a renewed and transformed relation to place and environment in *News from Nowhere* – the ubiquitous "'intense and overweening love of the very skin and surface of the earth on which man dwells'" (132) – have, at their root, a profound political relevance. The inhabitants of Nowhere – including Guest, though he is only an interloper – possess a renewed receptiveness towards their environment, engaging with it with keen attention, enthusiastic delight, earnest affection and, above all, with a pervasive sense of pleasure. This relationship with place can come to exist because the places in question are a manifestation of the re-orientation of collective values which Morris believed would be occasioned by a transformed society run along radical socialist lines: the rejection of the demands of the market and of profit as the primary dictators of societal configuration, and the embrace above all of the principles of utility and pleasure.

For William Cobbett, who is concerned primarily with articulating the nature of the political *status quo*, places are things which appear to exist in-and-of-themselves as independent topographical and geographical phenomena before anything else. It is through a kind of 'reading' of these already-existing phenomena that Cobbett comes to relate to them, judge them and charge them with political meaning. For him, a place – usually a landscape – constitutes a collection of signs to be interpreted and subsequently documented, and it is through this process of interpretation and documentation that he is able to link the visual experience of place with the political, and to formulate a political sense of place which always returns, finally, to its source. Morris echoes Cobbett in this technique: firstly, he begins by sketching, Cobbett-like, the character of the people who populate Nowhere. Cobbett, travelling through various places, noted in the people he encountered everything from malnutrition and poverty to a hale and hearty self-sufficiency, and saw the presence and degree of such characteristics as inextricably related to certain types of landscape. This was a particular mode of conceiving of rural England which helped Cobbett to form his political sense of place. Morris's Nowherians, also observed from the perspective of a passing but highly observant traveller, likewise exhibit a prevailing sense of comfort, good humour, vigorous healthfulness and pleasure (though they are by no means uniform in character or in opinion, an element of the comfort in which they live being their freedom to dissent (Waithe xi)), and both the nature of the environment in which they live and their relationship to that environment constitutes an imaginative articulation of that post-revolutionary happiness in terms of space and place. In this important sense, Morris's sense of place is highly Cobbettian: the experience of place is, at a fundamental level, tied to the experience of everyday life for the worker (all Nowherians are workers of a sort, albeit happy ones). For both Cobbett and Morris, moreover, this latter experience is conceived of in a way which takes the firmly material as its basis. For Cobbett the emphasis is on the presence or otherwise of ample provision of work, access to common resources, proper clothing and decent food –

essentially the functioning of a rural economy which provides security, plenty and dignity. For Morris the emphasis is similar: the affective experience of the act of labour, and of the life which must sustain that labour.

Nonetheless, there are, as we have seen, a number of differences between Cobbett and Morris in terms of their political sense of place. Firstly, in Morris's *News from Nowhere*, the experience of place is not only visual, as Cobbett's mostly is, it is also sensuous and visceral. Secondly, this intimate portrait of the experience of place functions as an articulation, or a statement, of a broader political ideal. Cobbett's political sense of place, by contrast, arises out of the application to already-existing landscapes of his own pre-existing political vision, which certainly affects how places are perceived and evaluated but does not attempt to extend or enrich that vision through the imaginative *transformation* of place, as Morris does.

Morris's sense of place in *News from Nowhere* is, then, a manifestation of a wider-ranging affective utopia – a love of the surface of the earth which is part and parcel of Morris's new utopian socialist way of life. The ways in which Morris's Nowherians experience place make manifest the ultimate aim of Morris's political project, which is the transformation of affective life, from the fear and misery of the nineteenth century to the pleasure and delight of a longed-for future. But Morris's political vision is not only oriented towards the future – it is, of course, also deeply concerned with the life of the past. In this respect, Morris again begins to align with Cobbett. It is the nature and closeness of this alignment which is the subject of the next chapter.

Reformation and Renaissance: Visions of the Sixteenth Century and the Historical Development of Capitalism in the Work of William Cobbett and William Morris

Section I: William Cobbett and the Catastrophe of the Reformation

As well as a countryman, journalist, politician, yeoman farmer and popular tribune, William Cobbett conceived of himself as something of a historian. Though he did not possess an all-encompassing structural view of history – unlike William Morris, who, as will be seen, attempted to understand historical change as part of a dialectical cycle of growth, decay and re-emergence – Cobbett engaged constantly with the subject of history: who had written it and why, what it consisted of, what it prophesied, how it could be used. Cobbett pursued this topic across the broad range of his later published works, from the pages of his *Political Register* (1802-1836), to his *Rural Rides* (1830), to his extremely widely read[26] *History of the Protestant Reformation*. Indeed, in 1830 he announced in his *Two-Penny Trash* – a cheaper version of the *Political Register* – a characteristically quixotic plan to write and publish an entire history of England, in monthly instalments. This history of England – "[a] *true one*; not a *romance*" (Cobbett, "HISTORY" 46-47) – would "[give] the borough-villains a better blow than they had had for many, many years". He continued:

> These incomparable villains (for what is *equal* to their villany [sic]) shall have their *due*, their full due, in my history, which shall show *how they got* their possessions; and enable the nation to judge of the *right* that they have to keep them. Our histories are romances, written by pensioned and bribed slaves. It is high time that the people knew the truth; high time that they saw the degradation into which they have fallen, and *the causes of it*. (47)

[26] By 1828, sales of the *History of the Protestant Reformation* reached seven hundred thousand, "a figure that did not include printings in Ireland and abroad from Romania to Venezuela to Australia; the sales in America alone were said to exceed one hundred thousand" (Manning 433).

Though Cobbett's grand ambitions in this task were never fulfilled, and his history of England never published, the force of his intentions here illustrates the extent to which an engagement with history was, for him, a matter of the most profound political importance. Like William Morris after him, Cobbett saw in the very stuff of history – and specifically England's pre-industrial history – a significance beyond mere nationalist state-building, antiquarian inquiry or Whiggish self-regard. For Cobbett, history was an exemplar, just as it was for Morris: it represented what had been lost, and what it was possible to gain. History was at once the arena in which Cobbett, with all his bullish obstinacy, would meet his detractors and his enemies, and the weapon he would use to strike at them.

Critics often argue that Cobbett was a muddle-headed, nostalgic fantasist, looking longingly back to the England of his boyhood, determined to drag himself back to an idyllic, settled, hierarchical rural past – and the labourers of England with him. As Ian Dyck observes, "The most prominent stereotype of Cobbett is of a rural rider who indulged in a wayward nostalgia for some obscure and distant Eden that probably never existed" (*Rural Popular Culture* 125). The reinforcement of such a stereotype is not lacking among critics: Alice Chandler writes that "[b]oth in his early Tory period and in his later, more prolonged and famous radicalism, Cobbett's real aim was to bring back the idyllic and prosperous world of the 1760s and return the nation to its ordered and agricultural past" (61). Decrying Cobbett's "artifice in declaring that the Middle Ages were all good" (79), Chandler argues that he "thought that the way to give [labourers] protection was to revive the paternalistic aristocracy of the past" (81). Likewise, Karl W. Schweizer and John W. Osborne write of Cobbett that "[h]is outlook was medieval … he championed the sturdy peasant of the Middle Ages" (147). Osborne and Schweizer go on to assert that Cobbett "did not switch from Tory to radical at any time. He was always a deep-dyed reactionary" (155). Cobbett would, they are certain, "have dismissed as irrelevant modern historians who argue that pre-industrial England was no paradise; he felt that he knew better" (155-156). Even

Raymond Williams, usually favourable towards Cobbett, charges him with a "share of responsibility for that idealization of the Middle Ages which is so characteristic of nineteenth-century social criticism" (*Culture and Society* 37).

Certainly, there is something of a basis for these arguments – Cobbett was, at times, entirely capable of enthusiastically depicting an Edenic 'lost England', which appeared for him in various forms. In his *History of the Protestant Reformation*, for example, Cobbett sometimes indulges his admiration for pre-Reformation England most freely. As will be seen later in this chapter, William Morris was occasionally capable of doing something very similar, though his focus was particularly on the experience and conditions of labour, especially as regards the artist and artisan. Cobbett's focus is wider: for him, the society of medieval England was one of national wealth, strength, harmony and solidity, distributed broadly amongst the people as a whole. Beginning the final chapter of the *History*, Cobbett declares that "the people were better off, better fed and clad, before the 'Reformation' than they ever have been since … the nation was more populous, wealthy, powerful and free before than it ever has been since that event" (374). He goes on to declare "that England was, in Catholic times, a really wealthy country; that wealth was generally diffused; that every part of the country abounded in men of solid property; and that, of course, there were always great resources at hand in cases of emergency". "England was then", Cobbett is sure, "a country abounding in men of real wealth" (381). These men "suffered neither kings nor parliaments to touch their property without cause clearly shown. They did not read newspapers, they did not talk about debates … but they thought hunger and thirst great evils" (383-384). The church was "naturally the guardian of the common people" (384), and "great and general happiness and harmony and honesty and innocence" (395) prevailed throughout England. It is not entirely clear whether Cobbett is making these arguments for rhetorical effect or whether these convictions are ones which he genuinely held, but the fact remains that at points throughout his *History of the Protestant Reformation* Cobbett seems to exhibit a distinct tendency to regard his own conception of

pre-Reformation England in positive, even admiring terms. Such an idealisation can appear, at times, very much like a kind of medievalist nostalgia.[27]

Unlike William Morris, for whom, as will be seen, the society of the high Middle Ages represents a time of particular artistic and social achievement, Cobbett also appears to idolise a more recent England: the England of his youth. “All that I can boast of in my birth is that I was born in old England” (Cobbett, *Progress of a Plough-Boy* 2), he declared. His *Cottage Economy*, though an undeniably practical book, had its fair share of nostalgic musings: “The people of England have been famed, in all ages, for their *good living*; for the *abundance of their food*, and *goodness of their attire*. The old sayings about English roast beef and plum-pudding, and about English hospitality, had not their foundation in *nothing*” (8). “In former times”, Cobbett goes on to say,

> to set about to show to Englishmen that it was good for them to brew beer in their houses, would have been as impertinent as gravely to insist that they ought to endeavour not to lose their breath; for, in those times (only forty years ago), to have a *house* and not to brew was a rare thing indeed (14).

And likewise, in the *Rural Rides*, Cobbett exhorts the reader to “be astonished, if you can, at the *pauperism* and the *crimes* that now disgrace this once happy

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[27] It is necessary here to note the important fact of Cobbett’s distinctly anti-Semitic tendencies. John W. Osborne has noted that “[i]t is one of the minor mysteries of British historical writing that Cobbett's gross anti-Semitism should be almost ignored” (“William Cobbett’s Anti-Semitism” 87). Much of the time, Cobbett’s antisemitism is economic or political in character: he is prone to repeating “the familiar accusation that as money changers, Jews were willing tools of oppressors” (89). In *Rural Rides* Cobbett frequently refers to “Jews” in the same disdainful breath as the rest of his political enemies: “Jews, loan-jobbers, stock-jobbers, placemen, pensioners, sinecure people, and the people of the ‘*dead weight*’” (37); “Jews and jobbers” (125); “Jews, jobbers and tax-eaters” (150). Sometimes, however, Cobbett’s antisemitism ties in directly with his medievalist nostalgic tendencies. In an edition of the *Political Register* published on the fifth of June 1830, Cobbett expressed the highly alarming opinion that “[i]n our own country, the history of [Jewish people] is quite sufficient to convince any man of the ruinous consequences of permitting even their existence to any considerable extent” (“TO BIG O” 731). Cobbett went on to claim that “[t]he greatest King that ever reigned in England, since the days of Alfred; the greatest, the wisest, the bravest, Edward I., whose reign was a reign of justice unparalleled, banished [Jewish people] for ever; and every great lawyer has applauded the wisdom of that banishment” (731-732).

and moral England" (227). Once again, it may well be the case that Cobbett is invoking the concept of a vanished Arcadia to add rhetorical force to his argument – he was a politician as much as a journalist, after all – but it is not difficult to see why, based on lines such as these, critics have drawn the conclusion that Cobbett represents a reactionary nostalgic tendency in early nineteenth century radical discourse.

Bearing this nostalgic tendency in mind, it is nonetheless the case that Cobbett's conception of history is not always and only one of uncritical idealisation. More often than not, in fact, Cobbett used his vision of pre-Reformation England not as a pleasant vision of a vanished golden age but as a powerful political and rhetorical tool with which to attack the sordid and exploitative society of his own present, just as William Morris was to do six decades later when he compared the independent and creative medieval artisan with the oppressed factory hand of the nineteenth century, as will be seen later in this chapter. As Cobbett's biographer George Spater pithily observes, "Those who claim that Cobbett was looking for the restoration of a golden age are talking nonsense" (1: 201). Instead, Spater claims elsewhere, "[Cobbett] saw various features of the past that he liked, and wished to see them preserved" (1: 5-6). Indeed, many recent critics have advanced this line of thinking: Gregory Claeys calls Cobbett's historical utopia "a model against which to compare the present, not a condition which could be recreated any more than we might return to the state of nature" ("Are We in England?" 25), while Ian Dyck argues that "Cobbett did not seek to restore the past for the past's sake; what he wanted was radical reform, and by that he meant not nostalgia but simply '*a change for the better*', whether that meant going forward or backward" (*Rural Popular Culture* 147). These arguments represent an important and illuminating reassessment of Cobbett's attitude towards history and its meanings, and here I wish to extend this reassessment, in order to take into account a sometimes-overlooked facet of Cobbett's historical work (one which Dyck hints at): the way in which he attempted to wield history as a political weapon. For Cobbett, a politician as much as a journalist or a writer,

history was not only a device with which he could articulate his objections to the emerging capitalist society in a purely intellectual sense, nor was it merely a mirror to hold up to the present, or a list of indictments to present at its trial. History was also a palpable political *force* – an accumulation of massive rhetorical weight, the vigorous application of which could, so Cobbett hoped, beat back the denizens of the new capitalist economy.

The Weapon of History

In order to use history as a weapon, Cobbett had first to understand how and by whom it was written. Cobbett is as much concerned with the context and method of historical writing as he is with the stuff of history itself:

> The far greater part of those books which are called *Histories of England* are little better than romances. They treat of battles, negociations [sic], intrigues of court, amours of kings, queens, and nobles; they contain the gossip and scandal of former times, and very little else. The great use of history is to teach us how laws, usages and institutions arose, what were their effects on the people, how they promoted public happiness, or otherwise; and these things are precisely what the greater part of historians, as they call themselves, seem to think of no consequence. (21-22)

Here, Cobbett is placing himself against the school of history as "romance" and on the side of – or at least in relation to – the school of historiography concerned with the sober tracing of the development of social and institutional history. This school, which would be developed later in the nineteenth century by historians such as William Stubbs, Edward Augustus Freeman and John Richard Green (Burrow 1-7), had an early pioneer in Sharon Turner, author of *The History of the Anglo Saxons* (1799-1805). Cobbett seems to have read Turner, having cited him as a source in his *History of the Protestant Reformation* (103). Turner was an early historian of Anglo-Saxon England, and though not in any sense a radical, possessed a radical's interest in the 'ancient constitution' and the Anglo-Saxon 'Witena-gemot' as antecedents of modern English institutions (Burrow 118-119). While "[asserting] the benefits of progress and [refusing] to be bound by the chains of obsolete antiquity;

[Turner] also managed to identify an ancient constitution almost indistinguishable from an idealised version of the modern one" (119). Cobbett, consciously or not, is very much writing in this way in his historical work, making use of apparently remote historical incidences and processes to illuminate the present moment – though, as will be seen, Cobbett is not concerned to trace a history of continuous development and improvement, nor, as with William Morris, a dialectical pattern of cyclical progression, but rather a catastrophic process of decay and decline.[28]

Cobbett is not only interested in how history is written, however. He is equally interested in *who* is writing it, and for what purpose. In his *Advice to Young Men*, he declares that "[o]ur '*Historians*,' as they are called, have written under fear of the powerful, or have been *bribed* by them; and, generally speaking, both at the same time; and, accordingly, their works are, as far as they relate to former times, masses of lies unmatched by any others that the world has ever seen" (51). Here, Cobbett draws an explicit link between class interests and differing conceptions of history, unabashedly calling into question the veracity of contemporary historians, rejecting "an historical theory of continuity and incremental reform, which … was claimed by Whig and Tory for conservative political purposes" (Dyck, *Rural Popular Culture* 147).

As is usual with Cobbett, he is not afraid to name names – or rather, he is not afraid to name one name in particular. While he does occasionally direct his ire at other historians – for example John Tillotson and Gilbert Burnet, both seventeenth century historians writing broadly in favour of the Protestant ascendancy (*History of the Protestant Reformation* 69), or George Chalmers, a Scottish antiquarian writing in the early nineteenth century (388) – David Hume, author of the extremely influential *History of England* (1754-61), is, for Cobbett, the chief historiographical villain.[29] Although Cobbett never explains

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[28] Katey Castellano points out that Cobbett's *History of the Protestant Reformation*, in its conception of historical 'progress' as an ongoing catastrophe, bears a similarity to Walter Benjamin's notion of the angel of history (576).

[29] Cobbett was not alone amongst historians in his antipathy towards Hume – Hume's history was dominant "for over half a century", and numerous historians of the early

in detail the specific reasons for his dislike of Hume as a historian – he very rarely quotes Hume directly – it is clear that he uses the figure of Hume as a general symbol for a specific idea: the now-familiar idea of the Whig view of history (as will be seen later in this chapter, William Morris also directed a degree of criticism towards this conception of history). This notion – first identified by Herbert Butterfield in *The Whig Interpretation of History* (1931) – broadly refers to the practice of "reading history as a progress, starting in some benighted time and somehow directed upon, or inevitably culminating in, the glorious present" (Blackburn, "Whig view of history").[30] Cobbett's attacks on Hume are almost always based around the latter's perceived rejection of the feudal past in favour of an enlightened present. He accuses Hume of "[railing] against the *feudal*-system" (*Rural Rides* 125), declaring that Hume would "fain have us believe [that the pre-Reformation English] were a mere band of wretched beggars" (*History of the Protestant Reformation* 388), calling him "malignant" and a "[reviler] of monastic life" (101), excoriating him for accusing medieval Catholic peasants of idleness and selfishness (99-100). For Cobbett, Hume stands for the conception of history which maintains that every aspect of England's feudal past was hopelessly backward, or inefficient, or merely an embryonic stage in the development of the perfect contemporary moment, insisting that the present arrangement of things – the 'enlightened' present – represents a state of optimum efficiency, rationality and civilisation. This Whig view of history is, for Cobbett, inextricably associated with the rise of capitalism. As J. W. Burrow notes, in the Whig view of history "[t]he past may be revered; it is not regretted, for there is nothing to regret" (3). This attitude of condescension towards the past therefore allows any customary rights or

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nineteenth century (especially later Whig historians) "announced at some point [their] intention of refuting the distortions of Hume" (Burrow 26).

[30] In his enthusiasm for the capacity of history to teach the origins of "laws, usages and institutions", Cobbett himself might be accused of a certain tendency towards a Whiggish interpretation of history, which is eager to tell "the story of the triumph of constitutional liberty and representative institutions". It is his refusal to conceive of history as a straightforward "success story" (Burrow 3), however, which ultimately prevents him from embracing this tendency.

socio-economic structures rooted in that past to be very easily dispensed with, and newer structures – structures based on utilitarianism and the cash nexus that Cobbett asserts may be equally, if not more exploitative or oppressive than their feudal predecessors (*Rural Rides* 125) – to be imposed upon the greater part of the people. Indeed, Cobbett considers the Whig view of history not only as a symptom but as a *cause* of the economic and social crises attendant upon the development of nineteenth-century capitalism, as he reveals when he writes on the subject of pre-Reformation England:

> everything shows that England was then a country abounding in men of real wealth, and that it so abounded precisely because the king's revenue was small; yet this is cited by Hume and the rest of the Scotch historians as a proof of the nation's poverty! Their notion is that a people are worth what the government can wring out of them, and not a farthing more. And this is the doctrine which has been acted upon ever since the 'Reformation,' and which has at last brought us into our present wretched condition. (*History of the Protestant Reformation* 381-382)

Essentially, Cobbett understands the use of history only insofar as it has direct political relevance. J. W. Burrow writes that "[f]rom Burke onwards,[31] a self-conscious and influential school of English political thinking has held that political wisdom, and the identity of a society, and hence in some measure the appropriate conduct of its affairs, are found essentially in its history" (2). Cobbett seems to understand this in his own moment – he is not merely demanding a greater standard of objective truth or analytical rigour in the study of history, rather he is demanding a full-scale reorientation of historical inquiry in order to counter the political narrative of those in power, which appears as it does primarily in order to justify and perpetuate the status quo.

Having ascertained that the writing of history can be as much a matter of power struggles as of intellectual inquiry, Cobbett is then determined to

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[31] Raymond Williams traced specific links between Burke and Cobbett in the first chapter of his book *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. As Williams writes, "In the convulsion of England by the struggle for political democracy and by the progress of the Industrial Revolution, many voices were raised in condemnation of the new developments, in the terms and accents of an older England. Of all these, two have survived as the most important: Burke and Cobbett" (23).

wrest back control from the dominant parties and establish his own historical narrative, one which runs counter to the Whig-aligned hegemonic forces which he sees as his adversaries. The *History of the Protestant Reformation* is probably Cobbett's most concentrated effort in this arena. Though in considerable part a work of religious history, this boisterous text is at the same time an attempt to conceive of the origins of capitalism in Britain through the lens of the Protestant Reformation. As James Grande observes, "For Cobbett, the Reformation represents the beginning of a shift in power, away from local communities based around religious houses and towards a centralized government and commercial economy" (166). The interdenominational conflicts of Protestantism and Catholicism are, despite appearances, relatively immaterial to Cobbett, who at any rate saw himself as nothing more or less than "a Protestant of the Church of England", with little practical allegiance either way (*Rural Rides* 387). It is the political, economic and social processes which these conflicts brought about that Cobbett is really interested in, and which he is determined to emphasise. In the course of the *History*, 'Catholic England' and 'Protestant' or 'post-Reformation England' come to serve as indicators of general economic, political and social formations which were either disappearing or coming to the fore. As Leonora Nattrass points out, much of Cobbett's *History* is oppositional in structure – that is, it posits specific opposing factions or cultures, arguing explicitly for one and against the other. For Nattrass, the "first and recurring opposition [in the text] is that between pre- and post-Reformation England" (162), which itself stands for the larger conflict between the suffering many and the increasingly wealthy few, especially in the administration of poor relief (161-163).

Cobbett's picture of the Catholic church in England and its monastic communities may well be accused of being somewhat idyllic. For these communities, Cobbett asserts, "the work of charity, the feeding of the hungry, the clothing of the naked, the administering to the sick, the comforting of the widow, the fostering of the fatherless, came always in company with the performance of services to God." "For the uncertain disposition of the rich,"

Cobbett continues, “was substituted the certain, the steady, the impartial hand of a constantly resident and unmarried administrator of bodily as well as of spiritual comfort to the poor, the unfortunate, and the stranger” (29). Cobbett’s language here is all of harmony and balance – each named wrong (hunger, nakedness, illness) receives its correction. Cobbett’s language is also of familiarity and distinctly *human* empathy: the administrator presides over the monastery with their “hand”, the poor and unfortunate are given not just sustenance and shelter but “comfort”. Here it is possible to see what the idea of the Catholic church represents for Cobbett – not just some hallowed, long-dead institution, but a symbol of a particular economy and way of life. This way of life is based on the ready fulfilment of material human needs and a conception of human relations which takes as its fundamental element the principle of empathy, rather than mere abstract profit and blind accumulation. Such an attitude is, of course, echoed in A. W. N. Pugin’s conception of the medieval monastery in his book *Contrasts*, as will be seen later in this chapter.

Cobbett goes on to construct the idea of a monastery as a type of communitarian economy in miniature: “The persons belonging to a monastery lived in common; they lived in one and the same building; they could possess no property individually … each had a life interest, but nothing more, in the revenues belonging to the community” (31). For Cobbett, monasteries “were founded in great political wisdom”, and “were not, as the malignant and selfish Hume has described them, mere dolers out of bread and meat and beer, but … were great diffusers of general prosperity, happiness and content” (109). He continues: “One of the natural and necessary effects [of the monasteries] was to prevent that state of things which sees but two classes of people in a community, masters and slaves, a very few enjoying the extreme of luxury, and millions doomed to the extreme of misery” (109-110). Cobbett conceives of monastic institutions as “institutional [models] of common, shared property and resources” (Castellano 576). For rapacious individual acquisition is substituted liberally distributed wealth, for mean-minded utilitarianism is substituted unsuspicious, ready generosity.

This is not to portray Cobbett as a proto-Morrisian medievalist socialist, attempting to articulate a kind of monastic communism as a model for a workable alternative to capitalism on a larger scale. Unlike Morris, Cobbett certainly did *not* wish to abolish private property: "You may twist the word freedom as long as you please", he declared, "but at last it comes to quiet enjoyment of your own property, or it comes to nothing" (*History* 384). Nonetheless, Cobbett viewed unfettered access to the ready and generous assistance of the Catholic monasteries as essentially the inalienable right of a particular class of society: the "poor" and "unfortunate" population of England (*History* 29), which for Cobbett emphatically included the "labouring classes" (30), who were especially vulnerable to periods of hardship. For this class of people – which was, for Cobbett, "the main body of the people" (106) – the resources of the Catholic church were *a kind of* property held in common. This common property was, of course, distributed in a charitable fashion by an essentially paternalistic institution, but the fact remains that at the level of access, the resources and aid of the Catholic church, and especially of the monasteries, was something upon which, in Cobbett's eyes, the needy labourers of Catholic England could unequivocally lay claim. In this they were backed up not only by custom but by the medieval legal system, which, having its roots in the Magna Carta, granted stability of property to the Catholic church while at the same time enshrining in law its obligation to distribute part of that property to the "indigent" (390). Indeed, at one point Cobbett appears to indicate that the property of the Catholic church and the property of the poor are essentially one and the same thing, claiming that the Reformation constituted the "taking away of the *Church and poor's property*" (399; emphasis added).

Against his model of a happy, harmonious Catholic England, in which the church is the "guardian of the common people" (384), Cobbett contrasts a vision of the Reformation as a catalyst for the process of the wholesale robbery of the poor of what had hitherto been their right: "For Cobbett, the event of the 'Reformation,' specifically the Dissolution of the Monasteries, emerges as the

catastrophe that initiates the idea of 'progress' as a violent expropriation of commons from the poor … This plunder continues into the nineteenth century" (Castellano 576). "It was not a 'reformation' but a 'devastation' of England" which took place, Cobbett argues, "and it is my chief business to show that this devastation impoverished and degraded the main body of the people" (21). The deprivation of the right of the poor labourers of England to assistance from the Catholic church turned them gradually, in Cobbett's view, into a helpless proletariat, thereafter subjected without protection to "the imposing of heavy taxes, the giving of low wages compared with the price of food and raiment, the drawing away of [their earnings], to be given to paper-harpies and other tax-eaters" (399). Framing the Reformation as a great transfer of wealth from the monasteries – and therefore, in a sense, from the poor themselves – to wealthy individuals, Cobbett calls the wealth of the monasteries "a prize for an unjust and cruel tyrant to lay his lawless hands upon." Turning his fire on "Cranmer, Knox, and all the rest", Cobbett then declares that within the course of his book "[w]e shall see by-and-by with what alacrity they ousted, plundered and pulled down: we shall see them robbing, under the basest pretences" (34). From this initial act of plunder Cobbett draws a straight historical line, leading right up to the so-called Glorious Revolution and the creation of the National Debt. He writes, "[W]hen a 'glorious revolution' had taken place, when a war had been carried on and a debt and a bank created, and all for the purpose of putting down Popery for ever, the poor began to increase at … a frightful rate" (398).[32] His history concludes at the present day, in which "[w]e see the land covered at last with pauperism, fanaticism, and crime … The immediate cause we find to be the poverty and degradation of the main body of the people; and these, through many stages, we trace back to the 'Reformation'" (106). Throughout these furious condemnations, Cobbett's language is emotive and often hyperbolic – he is determined to impress upon the reader the cataclysmic

[32] By this, Cobbett means that more people were becoming impoverished, not that the poor were procreating more rapidly (a Malthusian notion which Cobbett would have rejected).

nature of the change which has occurred in English society since the first signs of the emergence of capitalism almost three centuries before. Through sheer rhetorical force, and invoking the gravity of historical precedent, Cobbett seeks to impress upon the reader the shameful extent of the proletarianisation of the labouring poor.

The medieval Catholic church and its monasteries are, then, symbols of what Cobbett wants his reader to imagine an 'older', pre-Reformation society to have been. At times this vision is certainly constituted in terms of a relative historical 'golden era' which existed somewhere in the vanished past, but at no point – not even at his most dewy-eyed, nostalgic moments – does Cobbett advocate an *actual return* to this era. Rather, Cobbett is utilising a specific vision of history to articulate the possibility of alternative economic and social structures based on moral duties as opposed to economic calculation, and common rights as opposed to individual acquisition. At its most radical, Cobbett's vision of 'old England', constituted through the monasteries, becomes an exemplar of a general economic and social alternative to the rapacious nature of nineteenth-century capitalism, and more specifically an alternative to the culture of acquisition, enclosure and exploitation which was ascendant in the first decades of that century. Even in its more conservative aspects, meanwhile, Cobbett's historical vision still works to assert the inherent right of the labourer to a dignified living beyond pauperisation and dependence. Cobbett does not wish to re-instate the obligations which bound feudal vassals and serfs to their lords in a rigidly paternalistic system. Rather, he extracts from his picture of the past the fact of a society which takes the dignity and comfort of the labouring class as an important end in itself, and which holds to the principle that "[i]t is the chief business of a government to take care that one part of the people do not cause the other part to live miserable lives" (385). Taking this picture, Cobbett then uses it to signal both the wretched situation of the contemporary moment, and the possibility of other economic formations.

Not only did Cobbett refrain from simply advocating a return to the feudal past, at times he also openly acknowledged the wretched conditions of medieval society. In his open letter to Parson Malthus, published in the *Political Register* in 1834, Cobbett writes:

> As to the poor, when the lands were at first granted to individuals, those individuals were the heads of *bands* or little *knots* of men. The leader, in time, called himself the *lord*, and those under him his *vassals*, or *villeins*, or, under tenants, and almost slaves. The lords had the service of the vassals and villeins, and the vassals and villeins were protected and taken care of by the lords. So that, in this, the worst state of things (always excepting the *present*) the *poor* must, of course, have had a provision, they being in some sort the property of the lords. (374)

The feudal past is, with the exception of the present, still emphatically "the worst state of things" – Cobbett is simply pointing out that the situation of the rural labourer under capitalism does not constitute an improvement of any sort, but merely oppression by different, more oblique means. Indeed, Cobbett contends that, although in a state of bondage, the villein or the vassal may have at least retained some fundamental rights to land and to basic provisions. Likewise, in his *Rural Rides*, Cobbett writes:

> HUME and other historians rail against the *feudal*-system; and we, '*enlightened*' and '*free*' creatures as we are, look back with scorn, or, at least, with surprise and pity, to the '*vassalage*' of our forefathers. But, if the matter were *well enquired into* … we should find, that the people of these villages were *as free* in the days of WILLIAM RUFUS as are the people of the present day; and that vassalage, only under other names, exists now as completely as it existed then. (125)

Again, Cobbett is not advocating a return to a feudal 'golden age' but rather using his conception of the medieval past as a springboard from which to launch his action against the present state of things. The feudal subject might have been unfree, Cobbett claims, but so too is the labourer under capitalism, who has been stripped of even those basic obligations which rulers once owed to their subjects. "Talk of *vassals*! Talk of *villains*! Talk of *serfs*!", Cobbett rages, "[a]re there any of these, or did feudal times ever see any of them, so debased, so absolutely slaves, as the poor creatures who, in the '*enlightened*' North, are *compelled* to work fourteen hours in a day" (127). It is the fact that the

supposedly "*enlightened*" capitalist system presents such an unflattering comparison even with the older, equally oppressive system of feudalism – a system which contemporary proponents of capitalism claimed to have incontrovertibly improved upon – which is, for Cobbett, its most palpable failing.

As Cobbett would no doubt have felt, however, such a critique would have been useless were it not put to practical political use. As Peter Manning writes, "The idealization [of pre-Reformation England] … was a tactic rather than an illusion" (434). Likewise, Ian Dyck suggests that Cobbett was aware of a general trend amongst rural workers of the era to view the past (this 'past', in their case, was about 1740) as a time of relative abundance and ease (*Rural Popular Culture* 145), and brought his politics in line with that conception, in order to more effectively promote his radical cause amongst the people it was most intended to aid:

> as much as possible [Cobbett] deferred to popular sensibilities, weaving the English workers' ideal of a superior past into a strong if subordinate historiography that claimed both a truth function and the more presentist agenda of supplying the information by which the people might compare their own condition with that of their ancestors. (132)

In this way, Cobbett made use of history in his political arguments in an eminently practical fashion. But he also fashioned history into a political weapon in a more potent way: he intended to use history not just as a tactic in a war of words, but as an actual call to arms, or at least to action. Cobbett is often accused of being wrong, or even dishonest, when it comes to hard historical fact. John W. Osborne has claimed that "[h]istory had no value for [Cobbett] except to contribute to the understanding and the solution of contemporary problems. This helps to explain why his *History of the Protestant Reformation* is one of Cobbett's least edifying books" (*William Cobbett* 216). The first part of this judgement is broadly correct: Cobbett was not concerned with hard and fast historical fact so much as using his own conception of history to make a political point. Indeed, as Leonora Nattrass has pointed out, "too dry a reliance on 'facts' would completely undermine the rhetorical purpose of the

text" (170). It is the second part of Osborne's judgement, however, which is incorrect: Cobbett's *History* may not be particularly edifying for the scholar of the Reformation, but as a work of political literature – as a blast of the trumpet against his opponents – the *History* is very edifying indeed. Or rather, it *was* very edifying – for it was Cobbett's goal to inspire to action the labourers *of his time* as much as anything else. As Cobbett declares in the closing paragraph of the *History*, "I have had in this undertaking no motive … but a sincere and disinterested love of truth and justice. It is not for the rich and the powerful of my countrymen that I have spoken; but for the poor, the persecuted, the proscribed" (401). Not merely "truth" alone, but "justice" – Cobbett places a value on his historical writing beyond mere accuracy. When he declares a desire to get at "truth", in opposition to "romances", he does not have in mind questions of factual rigour. Rather, by "truth" Cobbett means a general recalibration of the English historical vision – one which takes into account the greater mass of the people, both the primary agents and objects of history. This is the "truth" he aims for – a clearer, more comprehensive view of society as it truly exists – and it is inseparable from "justice". Cobbett wants, in his historical writing, to have a tangible effect on the world, to redress the balance in favour of "the poor, the persecuted, the proscribed". Cobbett did indeed want the English poor to "compare their own condition with that of their ancestors", but he also wanted that act of comparison to lead to concerted popular political *action*.

An essential part of Cobbett's efforts to facilitate and encourage political action through the writing of history was the format in which his historical writing was published. Like Morris, preaching socialism on street corners and writing in socialist newspapers such as the *Commonweal* and *Justice*, Cobbett was determined to catapult his politico-historical ideas into the heart of public discourse. The accessible nature of Cobbett's texts meant that they were angled distinctly towards a popular audience, and mass-circulation was to lead to political action. The *History of the Protestant Reformation* was originally published in a series of monthly letters, costing only three pennies each, in

print runs of 40,000 (Grande 165). The result of this would have been that the labouring poor, for whom it was meant, were more easily able to afford it. The massive circulation of the finished book is, of course, testament to the success of this enterprise. Equally as importantly, Cobbett reiterated his historical arguments time and time again in the pages of his widely-read *Political Register*. Regarding the *Register*, Ian Dyck notes that "[i]ts operative context was the pedlar's pack, from where it was vended at hiring-fairs, market-places and public houses", often being sold alongside popular forms of printed entertainment "such as chapbooks, almanacs, broadside songs and other assorted expressions of a magico-religious worldview" (*Rural Popular Culture* 82). Dyck goes on to point out that the *Register*, as well as Cobbett's revived periodical the *Two-Penny Trash*, was, by the 1830s, extremely widely read in political clubs and ale-houses from Gloucestershire to Kent, to Leicestershire, to Surrey (169). Indeed, Cobbett's tracts were sometimes mixed with older, oral traditions: "Resident in each village were a core of singers and politicians who were prepared to lead their class from within the context of an oral culture … [i]t seems that they served as the local custodians of Cobbett's tracts, which they blended with the more anonymous expressions of popular protest, songs in particular" (86). The way in which Cobbett's historical work was published and disseminated was of vital importance to his political project – by aligning his published work with other, more widely consumed printed material, both on a textual and a commercial level, he was attempting to insert his political ideas more directly into the popular discourse of the mass of the labouring public. Indeed, in purely quantitative terms Cobbett was far more successful in this endeavour than Morris, whose *Commonweal*, for example, only managed a circulation of three thousand a week, which was not even enough to cover the paper's costs (Miller, *Slow Print* 41).

The purpose of Cobbett's emphasis on mass-circulation, as well as his determination to align his historical work with popular cultural forms, was, as I have stated, to bring about decisive political action. Cobbett's highly emotive, combative and forthright works of history would become more politically potent

the more hands those works could be got into. He did not only want to change minds, but to change circumstances. Indeed, Cobbett was accused of being one of the principal instigators of the Swing Riots of 1830,[33] in which hayricks were burned, large farmers threatened with death and bands of labourers engaged in running battles with the yeomanry. At the exact time of the outbreak of these Swing Riots in Kent and Sussex – riots which "combined indigenous politics with sheer hunger and *memories of a superior past*" (Dyck, *Rural Popular Culture* 160; emphasis added) – Cobbett was touring the country delivering radical lectures which charged landowners with treason and tyranny, arguing that the rioters were simply asserting their customary rights (Wells 36). These very rights were, of course, really the core theme of Cobbett's historical writing – writing which he had been explicitly endeavouring to distribute as widely as possible.[34] In his *History of the Protestant Reformation*, for example, Cobbett declares that Henry VIII had "[held] out to the great an enormous mass of plunder as a reward for abandoning the rights of the people" (83). Cobbett was also writing on the very same subject of the usurpation of hitherto inalienable rights conferred by historical custom in the pages of his popular *Political Register*. On the twentieth of February 1830, shortly before the beginning of the Swing riots, he declared:

> Each man lives near about where his grandfather lived; every one hears of the change that has taken place; and, above all things, every man and woman and child old enough to understand any thing, looks upon his parish as being partly his; and a sufficiency of food and raiment he looks upon as his inheritance. Never, let what will happen, will these people lie down and starve quietly. ("TO THE READERS" 242)

Cobbett understood that the Swing Riots – which he had long been prophesying – constituted more than just hunger riots. Rather, the wave of

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[33] Cobbett was even of accused of being the anonymous Captain Swing himself (Wells 34).

[34] During the rioting of 1830 one Robert Mason was sentenced to transportation on trumped up charges of extortion, having enraged a country parson by, in the words of Cobbett, "telling the *parson* that [he] had read the *Protestant 'Reformation'* and that it had taught [him] all about *tythes*" (qtd. in Dyck, *Rural Popular Culture* 176-177).

unrest which swept South East England in 1830 had “a broader mandate on account that hunger and unemployment (probably no worse in 1830 than in 1816 or 1822) were now joined by a heightened political consciousness and by a series of oppressive innovations that humiliated village workers in the name of the Poor Law” (Dyck, *Rural Popular Culture* 152). Cobbett was aware that many rural labourers harboured an affection for ‘Old England’ as a time – and a place – in which victuals were more plentiful and rural economies more prosperous (135). He also understood that many rural labourers conceived of their right to a living off the land – whether in terms of produce or, in times of hardship, of poor relief – as an absolute right, legitimized by tradition and custom (205). With his radical historical writing, Cobbett sought to articulate these generally held assumptions in more nakedly antagonistic terms, pitting a class of avaricious appropriators and tyrants against the honest and steadfast but shamefully defrauded English labouring poor. For many years before the advent of Captain Swing, Cobbett had been working to publicly and repeatedly assert the value of the rights which rural labourers understood themselves to possess, using the medium of history to heighten a sense of a popular lineage, conferring upon those rights the gravity of antiquity. In constructing an image of history as the terrain of a struggle over the rights of the poor in the face of authority – a struggle which had so far gone, through deception and trickery, against the mass of the people – Cobbett was attempting to lay the groundwork for popular political action centred around their reclamation.

In his own career as a politician, too, Cobbett was prepared to make practical use of radical history as a method of articulating the plight of the rural labourer. In the years shortly before and during his time as MP for Oldham from 1832 until his death in 1835, Cobbett was a noted opponent of Poor Law reform (especially the infamous Poor Law Amendment Act, which despite his efforts was eventually passed in 1834). Very often, his public efforts to defend the old Poor Law from any encroachments were couched in terms of historical custom. For example, in a lecture, delivered in Manchester in the year 1831 –

a lecture which, with its invocations of Blackstone and Locke, was designed to appeal to the élite (Dyck, *Rural Popular Culture* 205) – Cobbett argued that the old Poor Law, which at least allowed some measure of substantive poor relief, was "the Magna Carta of the working people; it is written in their hearts, the writing descends from the heart of the father to the son" (*Manchester Lectures* 168). Even during actual parliamentary debates on the subject of the Poor Law Amendment Act, Cobbett very explicitly made use of the same historical arguments he had set out in his *History*, as well as in the pages of his *Political Register*. During a debate on the sixth of June 1834, for example, Cobbett observed that

> [t]he Commissioners had now and then let out facts that did not quite make for the end they had in view, pleasing those who appointed them, and it was in evidence in their Report, that in the parish of Breed [sic],[35] in Sussex, fifty years ago, there was but one cottage that did not belong to the labourers who occupied them: now there were but two cottages the property of labourers, 182 of whom were upon the rates. In another place the labourers formerly brewed their own beer: now they neither brewed beer nor drank it. (HC Deb 06 June 1834)

Likewise in another debate on the same topic on the sixteenth of June, Cobbett declared to the House of Commons that

> [t]he poor had a right to relief according to the Canon-law, the Common-law, and the Statute-law. When, at the time of the Reformation, the aristocracy took possession of the tithes and abbey lands, they not only robbed the clergy, but also the poor, whose right to a certain portion of those tithes had been legally confirmed to them. (HC Deb 16 June 1834)

Here again are clear examples of Cobbett making use of an appeal to history as a political tool, with which he is attempting to combat the gradual but ongoing degradation of the English labourer. By invoking such a hallowed – and pointedly *medieval* – text as the Magna Carta in public lectures, as well as by deploying his own radical conception of history as a parliamentary weapon, Cobbett again seeks to confer a profound sense of dignity and gravity onto the rights of the labouring class. He does so, moreover, in a most tangible,

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[35] Cobbett is probably referring to the parish of Brede.

practical and straightforwardly political sense, attempting (albeit in vain, in this particular case) to effect real and concrete change.

For Cobbett, then, the point of the study and writing of history – and especially the history of the cataclysmic societal shifts of the sixteenth century – is always and ultimately the acquisition of material justice. Likewise, for William Morris – a Cobbettian historian in some senses, though not in others – history has a similarly vital role to play in both political thought and political action.

Section II: Art and Economics: Morris's Sixteenth Century

In his *Rural Rides*, Cobbett deplored the fact that "historians rail against the *feudal*-system; and we, '*enlightened*' and '*free*' creatures as we are, look back with scorn, or, at least, with surprise and pity, to the '*vassalage*' of our forefathers" (125). By 1893, some seven decades later, William Morris believed that he had witnessed the dismantling of that attitude, along with the emergence of a concerted effort to engage in earnest – whether through art, literature or sober enquiry – with the subject of (mainly European) history before the supposed splendid harmony of the eighteenth century. "For many years", Morris wrote, "there has been a growing reaction against the dull 'grey' narrowness of the eighteenth century which looked on Europe during the last thousand years as but a riotous, hopeless and stupid prison". "The Middle-Class or Whig theory of life", he continued, "is failing us in all branches of human intelligence" ("Preface to Medieval Lore" 287). Morris noted especially a flourishing of the study of medieval history, writing that "[t]he light which the researches of modern historians,[36] archaeologists, bibliographers, and others, have let in on our view of the Middle Ages has dispersed the cloud of ignorance on this subject" (286-287). Indeed, during the course of the nineteenth century

[36] Among these were historians such as John Richard Green and Edward Augustus Freeman, whom Morris cites as being among "the new school of historians" that were "long familiar" with the complexity and interest of medieval history ("The Revival of Architecture" 319).

the study of medieval history, art and architecture[37] had progressed from an obscure eccentricity, of which Walter Scott felt he had to be ashamed (Kinna, *The Art of Socialism* 38), to a "a multifaceted phenomenon which manifested itself in multiple domains" (Bukowska 63).

Morris himself was, of course, deeply interested in and intimately acquainted with medieval society. Medieval history and art were particular fascinations for Morris, something which can be observed almost everywhere in his work, whether literary, craft-based, artistic or political. His interest in medieval art and architecture significantly pre-dated his commitment to socialism: it was present during his involvement with the Pre-Raphaelites (Faulkner, "Against the Age" 8-11), and was fostered during those years by the works of Ruskin, especially *The Stones of Venice* (1851-1853) (Faulkner, "Ruskin and Morris" 7). Importantly, by the 1870s Morris's conception of the medieval had become much wider-ranging – both geographically and chronologically – than that of most of his contemporaries: as Anna Vaninskaya points out, "His medievalism included the Icelandic sagas", as well as "the kinship structures of the Germanic tribes who resisted the domination of centralized and bureaucratic Rome" (Vaninskaya, "The Bugle of Justice" 11). Morris was, then, a thoroughgoing medievalist in a very expansive sense.

Morris's preoccupation with the medieval, however, by no means represents the sum of the historical vision which he arrived at as a socialist. As Marcus Waithe has argued, "Far from representing a quaint prelude to the mature political conviction of his socialist years, Morris's medievalism formed

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[37] As Alice Chandler makes clear in *A Dream of Order*, medievalism and the study of medieval history in the long nineteenth century ranged across periods of time and political factions, from eighteenth century Gothick whimsy, to the High Toryism of Disraeli and Young England, to the politics of protest embodied by Ruskin and Morris. For further in-depth studies of medievalism in the nineteenth century, see, among many, many others, Raymond Chapman's *The Sense of the Past in Victorian Literature*, Clare A. Simmons's *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature,* the collection of essays edited by Lorretta M. Holloway and Jennifer A. Palmgren entitled *Beyond Arthurian Romances: The Reach of Victorian Medievalism* and Charles Delheim's *The Face of the Past*. Along with these is a journal entitled *Studies in Medievalism*, published annually by D. S. Brewer, which is dedicated to a study of post-medieval perceptions of the Middle Ages.

an integral part of his peculiar brand of socialism" (xi-xii). Morris's socialist medievalism was not a nostalgic fantasy, nor a pessimistic sigh of despair, but in fact represented one aspect of a serious attempt to trace in the life of the past the myriad forces which – through uneven and shifting stages – led feudal society towards its own destruction and fostered the development of commercial capitalism. In this sense, Morris was concerned not only with the study of specific historical epochs but also with the very nature of historical change, and the processes and structures which governed that change.

In his particular conception of history, Morris, as will be seen, effectively synthesises various apparently differing influences and intellectual traditions into a new optimistic and imaginative vision. These influences and traditions include the firmly economic emphasis of Karl Marx, as well as the theories of later Marxists like Henry Mayers Hyndman and Ernest Belfort Bax, alongside the aesthetic theories of writers like A. W. N. Pugin and John Ruskin, who are concerned primarily with art and architecture. Morris's maintenance of a thoroughly materialistic focus in his conception of history – that is, a focus on the idea of class-struggle and the organisation of labour – demonstrates, as I will go on to show, the clear influence of Marx and his adherents in the Social Democratic Federation. It is his insistence on the primacy of material conditions which encourages Morris to develop an understanding of the growth of capitalism which takes as its basis such factors as the rise and decline of the guilds of craft, the expropriation of the agricultural population and the creation of the proletariat. What Morris does in his own historical writing is to relate this Marxist conception of history to the thought of writers like Ruskin and, in a less direct way, Pugin. With these writers, Morris conceives of the art of architecture as the most vivid embodiment of the life and values of a particular historical epoch. What distinguishes Morris, however, is that he takes this notion of a palpable relation between art and society and links it not only to the life of the individual labourer, as Ruskin does, but to the overarching material conditions which create that life in the first place. Then, with thinkers like Bax, Morris enfolds the above within an all-encompassing theory of history

as a spiral, in which the movement of history is comprised of numerous interconnected social and economic factors, which operate on a broad chronological scale and which move in cycles of growth and decay. These cycles are themselves part of an upward spiral, through which different states of society, repeating themselves in ever-elevating forms, progress eventually from barbarism to communism. It is, further, in art – especially architecture – that Morris sees the most clear and potent expression of that cyclicality and progress. For Morris, the life of the past can in this way be projected imaginatively into the future, allowing for the articulation of a world, as yet unimaginable, which might be brought into being through socialist action. In the tumult and transformation of the sixteenth century, Morris sees an inverted image of future historical development: a particular example of a greater structural pattern of growth and decay.

William Cobbett did not think in such a prophetic way. It is true that for Cobbett, as for Morris, history was not only a matter of factual enquiry into long dead figures and vanished institutions: Cobbett brought the past firmly into the present, creating a historical picture of a vanished era which embodied the values of communality and care – though, importantly, in a relative sense. This kind of "radicalized medievalism" was something which, as Marcus Waithe points out, Cobbett can be said to have pioneered (xiii), bringing as he did "a nostalgic reading of the Middle Ages into direct, polemical confrontation with contemporary modes of existence" (16). With his historical picture of the Reformation and its consequences he attempted to rouse the labourers of England to action, trying to imbue them with a sense that they had been deprived of the possibility of a better life through plunder and greed: a life which they could reclaim once more if they were willing. What this future life might look like, however, Cobbett was not able to say. Cobbett did not wish simply to recreate the past, certainly, but neither did he possess any kind of comprehensive vision of a transformed society. Prioritising full bellies, plentiful work and decent clothing, Cobbett did not develop a broader notion of history. There was no grand Cobbettian theory of the nature of historical change. He

could conceive of the Reformation in the sixteenth century as a cruel blow from which England was still suffering, but nowhere did he attempt to relate it to any kind of overarching structural view. For Cobbett, the Reformation was an act of colossal human greed, not the outcome of any kind of slow economic movement or vast and complex ideological shift. In his vision, a group of avaricious plunderers seized the wealth of the monasteries and distributed it amongst themselves, resulting in the breakup of traditional communal economies and their replacement by unfeeling capitalist ones. This process is local and accidental, having no connection to outside forces beyond the human motivations of those who initiated it, nor any relation to broader changes which might precede or succeed it – whether economic or otherwise – beyond the conditions which the process itself brought into being. Morris the Marxist, however – whom Marcus Waithe names as Cobbett's heir as far as "radicalized medievalism" is concerned (xiii) – took Cobbett's powerful sense of historical grievance, as well as his relentless focus on the realities of working life under capitalism, and situated it within overarching economic structures and processes. Morris the Ruskinian, meanwhile, connected those economic structures to the question of art, giving them a vivid, tangible and imaginatively potent form. On this last point, Cobbett approached and perhaps even anticipated Morris in some respects, linking the perceived beauty and grandeur of medieval buildings with the apparent ease and plenty of the life of the medieval labourer in a most material sense. He may not have developed this link into a greater theory of labour and art, as Morris was later to do, but he nonetheless connected the appearance of art to the *material and economic* situation of the individual worker in a way which circumvents Pugin and Ruskin altogether, articulating, albeit dimly, a notion which, almost six decades later, Morris the socialist would have recognised as his own.

The most thoroughly Cobbettian aspect of Morris's conception of history, however, is the emphasis which it places on the sixteenth century in particular as *the* defining moment of transition from feudalism to capitalism. Imagining the development of capitalism in this way, Morris arrives at a kind of

deepened Cobbett-ism. Taking his own unique historical perspective – formed, as I have demonstrated above, from a synthesis of his various socialist and non-socialist influences – Morris looks for the historical genesis of the capitalist society to which he is so implacably opposed and finds it, like Cobbett does, specifically in the events of the sixteenth century. To Cobbett's focussed, aggressive hatred of the Reformation Morris certainly adds very considerable historical breadth and depth,[38] as well as a more complex view of art and architecture, but an accusatory gaze fixed firmly and particularly on the sixteenth century, charging it above all others with a ruinous legacy of political, economic, social and aesthetic ruin and decay, is common to both. In the light of such an important similarity, it is worth considering the extent to which Morris can be called a Cobbettian medievalist. This means examining in detail Morris's conception of the sixteenth century – as opposed to the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, which are more usually associated with Morris's sense of medieval history – in order to see with greater clarity the central position that this particular century holds in Morris's own image of the historical development of capitalism. The first vital element in this image is that derived both from Karl Marx himself and from his late-Victorian interpreters in English socialism.

Hyndman, Bax, Marx and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism

As will become clear, Morris's conception of the moment of transition from feudalism to capitalism is by no means entirely his own. Through contact with other socialists and their work, especially during the early stages of his socialism, he was left with a conception of historical progress which emphasised broad economic and social processes as the engines of change, chief among those processes being the expropriation of the agricultural

[38] In this section "the Reformation" is understood to refer mainly to the introduction of Protestantism as the state religion in England, Scotland and Wales in the sixteenth century, especially during and after the dissolution of the monasteries and the reign of King Edward VI.

population and the rise and fall of the guilds of craft. Essentially, a large proportion of Morris's notion of the period of transition between feudalism and capitalism – especially the economic parts – shows the considerable influence of both Marx himself and Morris's fellow Marxists. This is not to suggest that Morris was adhering to some kind of party line, or that his historical thought is entirely un-original, but rather that his "education in practical Socialism" ("How I Became a Socialist" 278) impressed upon him particular historical notions which he incorporated thoroughly and comprehensively into his own writing.

On the 17th of January 1883, shortly after his declaration for socialism, Morris joined an organisation known as the Democratic Federation, itself shortly to declare for socialism, at which point it would become the Social Democratic Federation. This fledgling organisation, which at the time of Morris's joining met in "the gloomy, stuffy basement of a ponderous building opposite the Houses of Parliament" (MacCarthy 463), was to constitute the *milieu* in which Morris first began to educate himself on the principles and practice of socialism.

The founder of the Social Democratic Federation was Henry Mayers Hyndman, "a maverick politician from a wealthy family". He had been a Tory for most of his life, but upon reading a French edition of Marx's *Capital* during a business trip to Utah in 1880 he almost instantly became a "convinced Marxian Socialist" (MacCarthy 464) and in June of 1881 founded the Democratic Federation. By most accounts Hyndman was a difficult, domineering personality – he earned the personal ire of both Karl Marx and Frederick Engels – and by 1884, Morris was referring to him as "a politician determined to push his own advantage" ("To James Leigh Joynes" 356). Nonetheless, as Nicholas Salmon points out, "Morris was one of Hyndman's disciples during his formative months in the socialist movement" ("A Reassessment" 30). Morris had certainly read Hyndman's attempt at a socialist history of England ("To Ellis and White" 263), entitled *The Historical Basis of*

Socialism in England (1883),[39] and was himself recommending the book to possible recruits for the Social Democratic Federation as "'well worth reading'" (MacCarthy 465).

The most important point of convergence between Hyndman and Morris's respective visions of the role of the sixteenth century in the growth of capitalism is the emphasis placed on the craft guilds. As I will go on to demonstrate, Morris saw the medieval guilds of craft as among the most dynamic and positive elements within medieval society, embodying a kind of communal ethic which, given time and the right conditions, would have developed ultimately into communism, had not the rise of individualism diverted their course. The decline of the guilds in the sixteenth century was, for Morris, not only an important point in the development of capitalism, but also a colossal waste of potential. As will be seen, this is one way in which Morris both is and is not a historian in the tradition of Cobbett: on the one hand, Morris's focus, insofar as he looks to history for an explanation of the society of his own present, remains firmly on the sixteenth century, taking that century as the site of a catastrophe out of which the exploitative and oppressive system of modern capitalism has arisen. On the other hand, Morris, in his conception of the nature of that catastrophe, is much more concerned with gradual shifts and drawn-out processes than with linear Cobbettian cause-and-effect, looking to the growth and subsequent decay of specific class formations. These formations themselves have, for Morris, a firmly economic basis: they take the shapes that they do as a reflection of the struggle between the increasingly influential possessors of capital, free of the fetters of feudalism – the nascent bourgeoisie, in other words – and the equally nascent proletariat:

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[39] There is something of Cobbett's declamatory style in the *Basis*: Hyndman might easily be paraphrasing Cobbett when he claims that, for example, during the Reformation the "last hold of the English people on their soil was torn off for the benefit of a clique of oppressors" (32). Hyndman also names Cobbett a number of times throughout, referring to him as someone who "pointed out the real state of the case" (387) and even citing Cobbett's *History of the Protestant Reformation* as a source (16).

that growing class of people who have no option but to sell their labour to the possessors of capital in order to survive.

Though Hyndman's enthusiasm for the guilds of craft in their period of flourishing is more limited than Morris's, he still considers them to be important historical factors: in his short treatment of them as they existed in the fifteenth century – Hyndman's "Golden Age of the People" – he writes that they were "thoroughly democratic" and "did secure for the working, trading, and even mercantile class in the towns advantages which they could not have got in any other way", including high wages, certainty of work and good conditions (11). Beyond this, Hyndman has little to say in their praise – it is rather, for him, their decline and fall which is of historical note. Hyndman sees the transformation of the guilds from democratic associations to hierarchical combinations of employers interested in increasing their own status: "the craftsmen became more and more capitalists … and constant endeavours were made to turn the handicrafts into the monopoly of a few families controlling journeymen who worked for competition wages" (47). Eventually becoming "associations of capitalists", the guilds ended up as bodies of avaricious employers: "In short, the domination of the employers became paramount to the guilds, and no attempt to restore the old democratic character of the charters met with full success" (48).

It is clear that, as I will go on to show, some of the historical detail in Morris's conception of the decline of feudalism – specifically on the subject of the craft-guilds – bears a similarity, in some respects, to certain parts of Hyndman's text. Indeed, in their accounts of the degeneration of the craft-guilds, Morris and Hyndman appear to have a common source: the German economist and historian Lujo Brentano, whom Hyndman cites as a source at numerous points in his book (11, 20, 48, 89), and with whom Morris appears to have had some familiarity (Vaninskaya, *The Idea of Community* 116). As with Hyndman, Morris's conception of the economic changes of the sixteenth century pays a significant amount of attention to the guilds and the corporations of the towns. Indeed, along with the expropriation of the

agricultural workers from the land, the guilds are, for Morris, a key economic unit in the development of capitalism, and it is the process of their decay in the sixteenth century which ultimately allows for the development of capitalism's driving force – the middle class. For Morris, "the history of the gilds [sic] is practically the history of the people in the Middle Ages" ("Art and Industry" 382-383). They were products of "the spirit of association which had never died out of the peoples of Europe, and which … had been kept alive by the gilds which in turn it developed" (382). For Morris, these guilds began as "associations for the defence of the carriers and sellers of goods", as well as "associations for the regulation of the special crafts" ("Art and Industry" 383). The trading guilds at first flourished, especially in England, where royal power used them as leverage against unruly vassals. But to their detriment they were "from the first aristocratic and exclusive", and "being nothing but governors, or at most administrators, on the one hand, and on the other not being an integral portion of the true feudal hierarchy, could not long hold their own against the gilds of craft, who all this while were producing and organizing production" (384). After a prolonged era of struggle, the craft guilds gained power "in the communes or municipalities". These craft guilds "[contended] not only against the mere tyranny of violence incidental to those rough times, but also against the hierarchical system, the essential spirit of feudality". This struggle was "the form which the class-struggle took in the Middle Ages." The period in which the craft guilds had control of the towns is one in which, for the craft workers at least, there is always the promise of work, which is, importantly, equally distributed amongst all members (386). Not only that, but the fourteenth-century craft-worker enjoyed a degree of solid independence from any form of control or class oppression in their work, "[working] not for the profit of a master, but for his own livelihood, which … he did not find it difficult to earn, so that he had a good deal of leisure" ("Architecture and History" 306). Essentially, the craft guilds, for Morris, fostered a spirit of both equalitarianism and freedom

in the very act of labour itself,[40] the polar opposite of the state of constant uncertainty, inequality, alienation and drudgery in which the worker under capitalism was forced to exist (313).

The era of the decline of the craft guilds is, for Morris, one of the crucial points in the history of the development of capitalism, more so, certainly, than the Reformation or the dissolution of the monasteries, to which both Cobbett and Hyndman assign considerable blame. Indeed, Morris's emphasis on the protracted decline of the guilds of craft in the sixteenth century represents one way in which he takes Cobbett's hyper-specific apportioning of historical blame and significantly widens its focus, taking into account greater expanses of time and farther-ranging economic and social transformations. For Morris, the craft guilds of the Middle Ages, which were up until the sixteenth century developing "towards Communism" ("Art and Industry" 388-389), were subsequently diverted towards the development of capitalism by the very thing which had in the fourteenth century made them so dynamic and valuable: their struggle against the hierarchical bonds of feudalism. In the end, during the sixteenth century, this struggle was perverted into a drive towards acquisition: "[the guilds of craft] opened chances to men of growing rich and powerful if they could succeed in breaking down the artificial restrictions imposed by the gilds". It was this very drive to acquisition, brought about by the struggle for status to which the guilds owed their existence in the first place, which "swept away the communistic aspirations of the fourteenth century" ("Architecture and History" 308). The era in which this process took place – the sixteenth century (308) – is, for Morris, the time in which "Europe first opened its mouth wide to fill its belly with the east wind of commercialism" ("Art and Industry" 389). The beneficiaries of this process were, Morris suggests elsewhere, none other than the ascendant middle class, who in turn began to exploit the class that had formed below them (a process which, for Morris, as will be seen, had its own

[40] The notion of the guild as a fundamental element of a future Socialist society would find its own political expression in the twentieth century, with G. D. H. Cole's Guild Socialism movement. For more on this see Samuel George Hobson's *National Guilds* (1914), as well as Cole's *Guild Socialism Restated* (1920).

origins in the expropriation of the agricultural population from the land), beginning the foundation of capitalism proper: “The workmen grew in prosperity, but also they began to rise into a new class, and a class beneath them of mere labourers who were not serfs began to form, and to lay the foundations of capitalistic production” (“Feudal England” 56).

As Anna Vaninskaya points out, “Morris did not go on to endorse trade unionism as the true inheritor of the guild ideal” (119). The same is true of Hyndman: he ends his analysis of the decline of the craft-guilds with a thoroughgoing catastrophist Cobbett-ism, arguing that “[w]e can directly trace the rise of our distressful proletariat to the robberies, the cruelties and the legislative infamies recorded” (49). The only results of the history of the guilds as far as Hyndman is concerned are the beginnings of the factory system, the creation of a wage-earning class and the “[entering] on the period of production for profit” (50). Morris, for his part, does not exhibit Hyndman’s catastrophism, but he does share his conclusion: that the decline and corruption of the craft guilds was a major driving force in the development of capitalism. Ultimately, then, a comparison of Morris not only with Cobbett but also with Hyndman illustrates precisely the degree to which Morris both echoes and also rejects Cobbett’s conception of historical change in the sixteenth century. Hyndman, when he is not preoccupied, as Cobbett was, with the Reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries, takes Cobbett’s declamatory catastrophism and only shifts its focus onto something else. Morris, meanwhile – maintaining a Cobbettian drive to locate the beginnings of the corrupted present in the sixteenth-century past and repeating in a broad sense Hyndman’s analysis of the decline of the craft guilds – outlines in a far more specific sense the ongoing economic and social changes underlying that decline. The changes in question are, for Morris, not just growing avarice on behalf of the guild-masters but also the ongoing constitution of the bourgeoisie and its attendant proletariat into distinct classes via slow ethical shifts – away from a kind of spirit of independent but egalitarian association and towards the consecration of

individual acquisition – as well as, relatedly, the gradual accretion of capital in particular hands (as opposed to simple theft and plunder).

More influential on Morris's conception of history than Hyndman was another of Morris's socialist colleagues, Ernest Belfort Bax, with whom, as will be seen, Morris significantly developed and broadened his conception of historical change. Bax – a "Herr Professor figure who was steeped in German philosophy and culture" (MacCarthy 507) – was a "powerful polemicist" on the "intellectual wing of the Federation", who "joined the party almost simultaneously with Morris" (MacCarthy 466). Bax had written a commentary on *Capital* which had earned the praise of Marx himself, and was a "regular attender at Engels' famous Sunday evenings where the Marxists in exile congregated" (507). Bax was also an outspoken misogynist and anti-feminist who believed that, under bourgeois democracy, women had been raised into a superior class which oppressed the downtrodden working man (MacCarthy 507; Thompson, *William Morris* 374).

For much of their time as socialist comrades, Morris and Bax maintained a close working relationship (Vaninskaya, *The Idea of Community* 79), and in the later 1880s, the pair co-authored a number of articles for the *Commonweal*, entitled "Socialism From the Root Up", which were compiled and released as a book in 1893, entitled *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome*. Notably, the latter text contains an entire chapter on the Reformation. In the chapter in question, it is claimed that the Reformation reflected "the new spirit of the times" (94-95), or the "new commercialism", which meant a move away from the "corporate ethics" of medieval Catholicism and towards the "individualist ethics" of the new Protestant church (95). This chapter and its contents might at first suggest that Morris's conception of history incorporated a Cobbettian emphasis on the event of the Reformation specifically. In fact, Morris appears to have had little hand in the composition of this particular chapter, and it should not be taken as particularly relevant to Morris's own view of the sixteenth century. Indeed, most of the historical judgements in the chapter appear to be almost entirely Baxian. Firstly, they exhibit a consistently

European perspective which is not particularly present in Morris's other historical writing – alongside the Reformation in England, for instance, the chapter in question gives equal attention to Emperor Charles V, the Peasant War in Germany and Louis XI of France (99-102). Secondly, though there are flashes of Morris elsewhere in the book, such as when it is claimed that "the Middle Ages were essentially the epoch of *Popular* Art, the art of the people; whatever were the conditions of the life of the time, they produced an enormous volume of visible and tangible beauty" (83), nonetheless most of the book, and especially the chapter on the Reformation, is written in Bax's dry, austere, detail-laden style. Moreover, as Anna Vaninskaya points out, "reading *Growth* in tandem with *The Religion of Socialism* and *The Ethics of Socialism* [both by Bax] (written in the same years) reveals just how much of this 'collaborative' effort was taken almost verbatim from Bax's essays" (*The Idea of Community* 79).

The above point notwithstanding, it remains true that Bax was a key figure in the development of Morris's historical vision. Most importantly for Morris, it was in collaboration with Bax that he incorporated within his own theory of history – which was already attuned to gradual and complex patterns of growth and decay – the notion of history as spiral: a cyclical process which nonetheless represented an upward progression towards communism. Bax, for his part, professed the spiral theory of history in a way which was Marxist in principle – he understood the history of society as an ongoing process of class struggle which would eventually lead to a crisis of capitalism and the implementation of socialism. Dissatisfied with what he saw as the too-materialist focus of Marx, however, Bax, drawing on his background in Idealist philosophy, developed his theory of history to include an emphasis on morality and ethical change: "In brief, he contrasted the unconscious community of primitive kinship societies to the self-interested individualism of bourgeois society and suggested that socialism would foster a communal idea that would transcend both" (Kinna, *The Art of Socialism* 98). Likewise, Morris understood history as a cyclical but inexorably forward-moving process. The question of

where exactly Morris derived this view is unclear – some critics claim that Morris had read Engels himself and was influenced by his notion of 'primitive communism' (Geoghegan 83). Such a notion held that early hunter-gatherer societies exhibited a crude form of communism, based in small communities that emphasised cooperation and the community of property, suggesting that communism was somehow latent within humanity and thus had the capacity to re-emerge, in a developed form, at a point further on in history. Others claim that Morris came to the idea of the spiral through Bax, who would himself have been influenced by Engels (Vaninskaya, *The Idea of Community* 80). Nonetheless, the idea that the movement of history constituted a spiral was a remarkable point of agreement between Bax and Morris (85). As Ruth Kinna observes,

> In principle, Morris believed that history was a cyclical process; like all things in nature, civilisations had a finite existence, and, no matter how glorious, each successive civilisation was destined to decline. Yet, just as nature marked linear time, history also charted a course of constant development. (*The Art of Socialism* 67)

For Morris, this notion of the spiral is in part a dialectical one, in that it advances to a degree the idea that history proceeds through the conflict of opposing forces: thesis and antithesis. The eventually dominant force always in turn generates its own opponent, which itself eventually supplants its predecessor, and so the process is continued. The conventional Marxist form of this idea, known as dialectical materialism, is based in the theory that the opposing forces in question are constituted by competing modes of production, by which is meant a particular organisation of labour and the class divisions associated with it. A distillation of this notion is provided in Marx and Engels's *Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

> Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

Thus the famous declaration in the *Manifesto* that "[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (482). It is possible to see examples of this same attitude in Morris's conception of the change that occurred between the decline of feudalism and the growth of capitalism, especially in the progress of the craft-guilds as I have earlier defined it (though it is important to note that, as will be seen, Morris also diverges in places from the purely Marxian notion of the dialectic, to the point where to call Morris's theory of history dialectic in the conventional Marxist sense would be to mischaracterise it to a degree). For Morris, the merchant guild first struggles against the feudal order, resulting in a new order – a new thesis – in which power lies not just with the feudal nobility but with the towns and the organised merchants within them. This new thesis generates its own antithesis, however: the newly empowered merchant guilds are fought against by the guilds of craft, and society is once again reconfigured as the momentary dominance of the craft guilds inaugurates the free and communal spirit of working which Morris so admired. This society in turn develops *its own* antithesis, as the emboldened and individualistic guild masters struggle against their own restrictions, giving rise to the ascent of the middle class, against whom the proletariat now struggle in turn, and so the dialectical process of history continues.

Where Morris and Bax's notion of the spiral differs from the standard dialectical conception of history is in the importance it places on recurrence: the spiral movement of history is characterised by the emergence, disappearance and subsequent re-emergence – in a developed form – of certain states of society. Whereas for Marx each thesis is an utterly new development in the course of history, for Morris each emergent thesis also constitutes the return, in a developed form, of an older thesis. This pattern of re-emergence is cyclical but also progressive, hence the notion of the spiral: every recurrent thesis gives rise to the eventual return of its antithesis, which pre-existed it. With each re-emergence, moreover, the thesis is developed,

taking on new characteristics. In Morris's view, the history of civilisation constitutes

> inchoate order in the remotest times, varying indeed among different races and countries, but swayed always by the same laws, moving forward ever towards something that seems the very opposite of that which it started from, and yet the earlier order never dead but living in the new, and slowly moulding it to a recreation of its former self. ("Architecture and History" 298)

The movement and development of this inchoate order is, as has been seen, constituted by a struggle between classes. Importantly, Morris neither anticipates nor desires the return of those older forms exactly as they were. "[I]t is a strange view to take of historical knowledge and insight," he writes, "that it should set us on the adventure of trying to retrace our steps towards the past, rather than give us some glimmer of insight into the future; a strange view of the continuity of history, that it should make us ignore the very changes which are the essence of that continuity" (315). So the 'spiral' movement of history is, for Morris, characterised by inexorable cycles of growth and decay, which contain within them the re-emergence – on a higher level than before – of older forms of society. Those forms themselves are altered in a way that brings humanity closer, in the end, to the ideal communal society – the end, as the socialist writer John Bertram Askew put it, of the "road winding up a mountain, which might seem to be always bringing the traveller back to the point from which he set out till he sees that it is ever and ever at a higher point" (qtd. in Johnson 129). Morris placed the Middle Ages of the fourteenth century within that spiral as an era of "communistic aspirations" ("Art and Industry" 389) which "saw the promised land of Socialism from afar" (388), and it is those aspirations which he ultimately wished to see return in a new form (390). On the other side of the spiral – the other face of the mountain – was the painful era of the transition from feudalism to capitalism during the sixteenth century.

Despite its debt to dialectical materialism, Marx – who died in 1883, the year Morris declared for socialism – would not have recognised this view of history as his own. Nowhere in his writing does he advance the possibility of the recurrence in a developed form of vanished historical epochs.

Nonetheless, Marx is a key influence on Morris's conception of the transition between feudalism and capitalism in the sixteenth century. Though he differs from Marx in his conception of the nature of the dialectical movement of history, he follows him more closely regarding points of historical detail, particularly in his conception of the role of the agricultural population in the development of the proletariat, and therefore of capitalism as a whole. Indeed, in this respect, as will be seen, Morris almost seems to have taken his historical facts directly from Marx.

Fiona MacCarthy has characterised Morris's reading habits during the early stages of his conversion to socialism as "omnivorous" and "receptive" (469), an attitude which applied particularly to his reading of Marx's *Capital*. Morris had begun to read a French translation of Marx's *magnum opus* in 1882, and by February of 1883 was, according to a friend, "bubbling over with Karl Marx" (qtd. in Thompson, *William Morris* 270). There has been considerable debate regarding the extent to which Morris was a thoroughgoing Marxist – whether, in other words, Morris's Romanticism remained the driving force behind his socialist politics, or whether his socialism came to absorb or even supersede his Romanticism.[41] One critic, bizarrely, has even gone so far as to assert that "when he joined the Democratic Federation in 1883 Morris had never heard of Marx" (Marshall 252). On the subject of the decline of feudalism and the subsequent rise of capitalism, however, it is indisputable that Morris exhibits a very clear debt to Marx. Indeed, Marx's and Morris's conceptions of the economic changes which were taking place in the sixteenth century are so similar as to be almost identical. Morris, like Marx, was interested in creating a comprehensive historical view of the development of capitalism rooted in the realm of the material. It is not the case, as Ruth Kinna has argued, that "[i]n Morris's writings it is difficult to find … a formal analysis of historical change" ("Time and Utopia" 39). His historical writing may not be as purely economic as Marx's, nor as metaphysically ambitious as Bax's, but it is nonetheless the

[41] Comprehensive summaries of this debate can be found in Ruth Kinna's *The Art of Socialism* 11-18, and Mark Bevir's *The Making of British Socialism* 85-87.

case that there is, in Morris's lectures and articles especially, an earnest attempt to give a formal historical account of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, grounded in economic observation.

Marx, for his part, does not dismiss the Reformation entirely. In the first volume of *Capital*, in the chapter entitled "Expropriation of the Agricultural Population From the Land" (a phrase which Morris borrows in "The Hopes of Civilization" (62)), he argues that "[t]he process of forcible expropriation of the people received in the 16th century a new and frightful impulse from the Reformation, and from the consequent colossal spoliation of the church property." "The suppression of the monasteries", he continues, "hurled their inmates into the proletariat", while the "estates of the church were to a large extent given away to rapacious royal favourites, or sold at a nominal price to speculating farmers and citizens, who drove out, *en masse*, the hereditary sub-tenants and threw their holdings into one." Meanwhile, "[t]he legally guaranteed property of the poorer folk in a part of the church's tithes was tacitly confiscated" (711). Here, Marx begins to echo Cobbett in his direct connection of the creation of an exploited proletariat with the dissolution of the monasteries. Indeed, at one point Marx even quotes Cobbett's *History of the Protestant Reformation* in support of his argument (712).

On the whole, however – as we would expect of Marx – his focus is considerably broader, and, in an approach which, as will be seen, Morris would later adopt, he conceives of long-term, economic changes as the driving forces behind capitalism's development. It is not simply the Reformation which has led to the rise of commercial society: for Marx, it is the far longer process "which takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production; a process that transforms … the immediate producers into wage-labourers" (705). Unlike Morris, Marx does not pay much attention to the guilds – a preoccupation which Morris appears to have got from Hyndman and Brentano, as well as from his own interest in medieval craftsmanship as part of his design work – but he does put a large amount of emphasis on the removal of the rural labouring population from the land and into the cities,

claiming that "[t]he expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process" (707). Marx looks to the period *surrounding* the Reformation – though not the process of the Reformation itself – as the time in which the creation of the proletariat begins, just as Morris would go on to do: "The prelude of the revolution that laid the foundation of the capitalist mode of production, was played in the last third of the 15th, and the first decade of the 16th century" (708). Marx sees "the great feudal lords [creating] an incomparably larger proletariat by the forcible driving of the peasantry from the land, to which the latter had the same feudal right as the lord himself, and by the usurpation of the common lands" (709). Marx goes on to stress the transformation of this mass of newly dispossessed people into easily exploited wage labourers:

> The spoliation of the church's property, the fraudulent alienation of the State domains, the robbery of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property, and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of reckless terrorism … conquered the field for capitalistic agriculture, made the soil part and parcel of capital, and created for the town industries the necessary supply of a 'free' and outlawed proletariat. (723)

Marx called this process of capital accumulation through expropriation in the early stages of the development of capitalism "primitive accumulation" (704).

As will be seen, Morris's conception of the history of capitalism distinctly echoes Marx's, both in terms of the actual events of the Reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries, and in terms of material conditions in a broader sense – specifically labour and class relations, and especially the role of the expropriation of the agricultural population of the land in the creation of the proletariat. Firstly, as with Marx, the dissolution of the monasteries does not hold a central position in Morris's conception of the historical transition from feudalism to capitalism in the way that it does for William Cobbett. It does, however, feature at certain points as an incident of historical note, just as it does for Marx, and is by no means entirely absent from Morris's historical accounts. It is true that Morris – an atheist – expressed a degree of sympathy with the medieval Catholic church (Salmon, "A Reassessment" 33),

acknowledging as he did that “any proto-socialist thought” of the medieval period would have taken “a necessarily Christian form” (Vaninskaya, *The Idea of Community* 130). For Morris, the medieval Catholic church “became a metaphor for Baxian human solidarity, the kingdom not only of God, but of socialism on earth” (131), and “sought to influence men to adopt the values of equality, fraternity and fellowship in their temporal affairs” (Salmon, “A Reassessment” 33). It is not surprising, then, that the few explicit references to the Reformation in Morris’s work are condemnatory in tone. In “Architecture and History”, one of Morris’s most comprehensive accounts of his historical vision, he refers to the Reformation directly: “The brutal rapine with which the change of religion in England was carried out; the wanton destruction of our public buildings which accompanied the stealing of our public lands, doubtless played its part in degrading what art was still possible under the new conditions of labour” (308). Likewise, in “Feudal England” Morris argues that “in the earlier period the Church was on the popular side” (41), and that “the Church was not withdrawn from the everyday life of men; the division into a worldly and spiritual life, neither of which had much to do with the other, was a creation of the protestantism of the Reformation, and had no place in the practice at least of the mediaeval Church” (42). These explicit references to the Reformation possess more than an echo of Cobbett: the Catholic church – a popular institution, on the side of the people – is subject to a process of violent expropriation and plunder, the result of which is the withdrawal of the church from the public sphere, along with the degradation of those who had been its subjects.

These examples aside, however, Morris – like Marx – generally refrains from assigning blame to the Reformation alone, arguing that “the Reformation itself was but one of the aspects of the new spirit of the time produced by great economical changes, and which dealt with art and its creator, labour, far more completely than any series of accidents could do” (“Architecture and History” 308). As his biographer Paul Meier argues, “[Morris] clearly tends to minimise the importance of religion, which was a living superstructure, simultaneously

influenced by and influencing the development of mediaeval art, to concentrate all his attention upon material conditions and social relationships" (2: 464). Importantly, Morris still points to the historical era *surrounding* the Reformation in searching for capitalism's historical starting-point, declaring that "to my mind our modern civilization begins with the stirring period about the time of the Reformation in England … this period includes the death-throes of feudalism" ("The Hopes of Civilization" 60). Likewise, in "Architecture and History" Morris asserts that "[t]he beginning of the great change came with the Tudors in the first quarter of the sixteenth century" (308). Shortly afterwards, writing on the subject of the modern factory system, Morris claims that while "machine-industry" is indeed a "revolutionary change from that of the mere division of labour", yet "[y]ou must think of [it] as … merely the full development of the effects of producing for profit instead of livelihood, which began in Sir Thomas More's time" (311). Ultimately, then, it is not the Reformation *itself* which is Morris's focus – as it is for Cobbett – rather it is "the gradual weakening of the bonds of the great hierarchy which held men together" ("The Hopes of Civilization" 60) which occurred during that time – hierarchical bonds which, for Morris, it must be remembered, were weakened by the dynamic activity and ongoing struggle of the craft guilds. Once sufficiently weakened, these bonds could be thrown out altogether and replaced with the capitalist ethos of the pursuit of profit. In this way, Morris maintains a broadly Cobbettian character in his historical writing, emphasising certain social and economic changes which occurred during the sixteenth century as the catalyst for the development of modern capitalism. At the same time, however, this emphasis is deepened and given greater substance by Morris's reading of Marx. Refusing to pinpoint any one particular historical phenomenon as the beginning of commercial capitalism, Morris instead takes a broader view, looking ultimately to structural processes of gradual but fundamental transformation. The driving force behind Morris's vision of historical change in the sixteenth century is essentially a focus on social relations – specifically the

social relation of class, and its effect on the material conditions of labour – a current which runs through Morris's conception of history as a whole.

Morris also echoes Marx in that he pays particular attention to one *specific* process of social and economic transformation. Both Marx and Morris subscribe to the belief that a vital process in the historical development of capitalism was the large-scale expropriation of the agricultural population from the land. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Morris writes, "England, from being a country of tillage cultivated for livelihood, became a grazing-country farmed for profit" ("Architecture and History" 308).[42] Presumably he is referring to the beginnings of enclosure here, though Morris does nothing to specify exactly what process he means. Nonetheless, for Morris this change constituted an "expropriation of the *people* from the land" ("The Hopes of Civilization" 62), a process which he views as a "tale" of "miseries". For Morris, the vital importance of this process lies in its effect upon the displacement of rural populations to the city, and the subsequent growth in the availability of wage labour:

> [the change in agriculture] had a very direct influence upon the conditions of life and manner of work of the artisans, for the crafts were now flooded by the crowds of landless men who had nothing but the force of their bodies to live upon, and were obliged to sell that force day by day for what those would give them who certainly would not buy the article labour unless they could make a profit by it. ("Architecture and History" 308)

This process of change itself gives rise to *further change*, as a widening gap in power and resources between worker and employer inaugurates a transformation in the nature of work itself:

> The change in the conditions of labour went on speedily, though there was still a good deal of what may be called domestic manufacture; the workmen in the towns got to be more dependent on their employers, more and more mere journeymen, and a great change was coming over the manner of their work; the mere collection of them into big

[42] This historical judgement can also be traced back to Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) – an edition of which was published by Morris's Kelmscott Press in 1893 – in which the narrator Hythloday decries the widespread practice of enclosing common fields for the purposes of rearing sheep, declaring that "'sheep … that used to be so meek and so little … devastate and depopulate fields, houses and towns'" (582).

> workshops under one master, in itself merely gave economy of space, rent, fire, lighting, and the rest, but it was the prelude to a much greater change; division of labour now began… (309)

In Morris's view, the rural population of England are deprived of access to the land – and thus their connection to a particular place, as well as their economic security – and so are compelled to seek waged work in the towns and cities.[43] As the quantity of waged labour available to the employers increases so its value decreases, and wage earners are made economically dependent on their paymasters, who begin to amass such a quantity of labour power that the division of labour becomes possible. The above similarities between their conceptions of the expropriation of the agricultural labourers therefore suggest that Morris almost completely absorbed the historical arguments which he encountered in Marx's *Capital*. Indeed, in "How I Became a Socialist" Morris confesses to struggling with the economic parts of the book but declares that he "thoroughly enjoyed the historical part" (278).

In spite of the considerable influence of both Marx and Morris's fellow Marxists, however, Morris's historical vision is not only economic, nor is socialist thought its only prominent influence. Economic factors provide the material bases for change, but the ultimate outcome and prime manifestation of historical change is, for Morris, art. In this, Pugin and Ruskin constitute vital figures of influence. It is art which, for Morris, provides the most illuminating insights into the vicissitudes of history, and which is the most potent expression of the lives of the people who experienced them. This is especially true of the time surrounding the Reformation. For Pugin and Ruskin, as for Hyndman and Marx, grave and momentous changes in the very structures of society were taking place in the sixteenth century as an old order declined and a new one

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[43] This is, of course, a Cobbettian preoccupation too, as I have shown in the previous chapter, though it is more present in works such as *Rural Rides* than in the *History of the Protestant Reformation*. Indeed, Cobbett is mainly concerned with enclosure and rural depopulation in his own time, rather than in any historical sense, and does not connect such a process to the ongoing development of capitalism beyond singling out for blame such things as the new system of paper money (*Rural Rides* 81) and his hated "*tax-eaters*" (79).

sprang up in its place (though their vision of what that change was and the effects it had were by no means the same as that of the Marxists). It was in art – and especially in architecture – that the nature of that change was fully expressed.

Pugin and Ruskin: History and Architecture

William Cobbett, as I have demonstrated, placed considerable value on medieval buildings, expressive as they were of a nobler epoch in which there were no paupers or poor rates and every labourer was well-fed and clothed. Cobbett's appreciation of these buildings was not particularly aesthetic in character – he does not appear to have had much interest in stiff-leaf capitals, rere-arches and tympanums. His was a moralistic architectural sense, seeing in such buildings – so palpably *of the past*, specifically of the pre-Reformation era – evidence of the greatness and potential of a vanished medieval civilisation which placed value on the welfare of its people rather than the wealth of its masters. Cobbett had no architectural or aesthetic training, but in his considerations of cathedrals and ruined abbeys he was anticipating the judgements of Pugin and Ruskin by a number of years (albeit in a less sophisticated form).

Morris was, of course, another great admirer of Gothic buildings. He certainly had more of an eye for architectural detail than Cobbett[44] – he could praise "clusters of slim, elegant shafts" and "tall wide lancets … elegantly glazed with pattern and subject" ("Gothic Architecture" 277). Moreover, for Morris the specifically aesthetic appeal of Gothic buildings was of very considerable (but not decisive) importance in his overall appreciation of them:

[44] As a young man, having just completed his undergraduate degree at Oxford, Morris was very briefly apprenticed to the office of the distinguished Gothic Revival architect George Edmund Street. Morris's formal architectural training there, begun in January of 1856, was to last less than a year (MacCarthy 103-108).

the high point of the Gothic spirit in the fourteenth century[45] was characterised by a "bright, glittering, joyous art, which had now reached its acme of elegance and beauty" (278). In spite of his keen architectural eye, however, Morris sees above all else evidence of a better life for the labourer inherent in the stones of medieval architecture, just as Cobbett had. For Cobbett, medieval buildings spoke of the value which the rulers of that time put on enriching and ornamenting the surroundings – and thus the lives – of their people, as well as the harmony of the society which produced them. For Morris, these buildings embodied not just a general sense of harmony and propriety, nor a paternalistic bond between master and worker, but a *spirit of working* – a spirit which spoke of the relative liberty, comfort and happiness of the labourer in the act of labouring itself, as well as the communal and collective nature of that labour. During the high point of the Gothic era, Morris argues, "every man who [produced] works of handicraft [was] an artist" ("Gothic Architecture" 279) – that is, the practice of art was spread amongst the population as a whole. Every great building constructed during the era of the medieval Gothic was, for Morris, a triumph of both the individual and the communal, working in tandem: a great Gothic building was "a harmonious *co-operative* work of art" (266; emphasis added), and "the foundation of all that nobility of beauty … in a building like Peterborough Cathedral" was a mode of working in which "the mind of the workman was allowed full play and freedom in producing it."

[45] Medieval Gothic architecture is usually separated into three phases: the somewhat simplistic Early English phase, generally accepted to have lasted from the late twelfth to the mid-thirteenth century, the more exuberant and extravagant Decorated phase, which lasted roughly from the later thirteenth century to the later fourteenth, and finally the more austere but also more complex and technically advanced Perpendicular phase, lasting from the end of the fourteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth (for more information on the subject see Nikolaus Pevsner's *An Outline of European Architecture*, as well as Spiro Kostof's more recent *A History of Architecture*). The Gothic style which Morris appears to have in mind as that which most embodies the free and communal Gothic spirit of working is the Decorated style. The Early English style, for him, "carried combined strength and elegance almost as far as it could be carried", but "sometimes … overdid the lightness of effect" ("Gothic Architecture" 277), while the Perpendicular, though "alive and vigorous", nonetheless "began to lose its exaltation of style and to suffer a diminution in the generous wealth of beauty", becoming "crabbed" and "common-place" (280).

Importantly, this mode of working is itself related to the state of society as a whole – first of all, it precedes the system of commodity exchange which characterises capitalist relations: "for such art there was no extra charge made; it was a matter of course that such and such things should be ornamented, and the ornament was given and not sold" ("Art and Industry" 387). Moreover, it is able to exist due to the power of the craft-guilds to facilitate, as I have discussed above, a high degree of liberty and autonomy for the worker ("Art and Industry" 386-387; "Gothic Architecture" 278).

Of course, this spirit of working – and thus this architectural beauty – was to wither with the decline of the craft-guilds, the expropriation of the agricultural population from the land and the beginnings of commercial capitalism. Just as the golden age of the fourteenth century had its architectural expression in Gothic architecture, so did this age of transition and decline have its own architectural spirit: that of Renaissance neoclassicism.[46] Just as the communistic aspirations of the guilds were destroyed by a rising tide of individualism, so Gothic architecture – the manifestation of those communistic aspirations – waned, to be supplanted by a lifeless, arrogant neoclassicism, itself an architectural expression of the new commercial spirit.

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[46] Morris is not specific about when his conception of the Renaissance begins and ends. There are, however, a number of hints by which it is possible to infer at least the century which he has in mind: for Morris, the Renaissance in architecture – with which he was primarily concerned – had its greatest expression in buildings such as St Peter's Basilica in Rome and St Paul's Cathedral in London ("Gothic Architecture" 282). St Peter's Basilica is a building primarily of the sixteenth century. It is true that St Paul's is a building of the end of the seventeenth century, but for Morris it is merely "[an imitation] of St Peter's, Rome", and is indeed no more than "an English rendering of the great Italian original" ("Destruction of City Churches" 164). It is also the case that Morris nowhere refers specifically or exclusively to the Renaissance in Italy, but rather appears to have in mind a more general embrace of neoclassicism in European art, a process which, in architecture especially, did not occur until the sixteenth century, which was really the "critical time of transition" from the Gothic to neoclassicism (*A History of Architecture* 403). It is, therefore, primarily the sixteenth century to which I have taken Morris to be referring in his discussions of the Renaissance and the rise of neoclassicism in architecture. This is in contrast with Ruskin, whose conception of the Renaissance, preoccupied as it often is with Venice, appears to begin somewhat earlier, in the fifteenth century. It is, however, in accordance with Pugin, who names the sixteenth century as the period in which a widespread embrace of neoclassicism began.

Morris, in "The Revival of Architecture", characterises the art of the Renaissance as the "dead corpse of a past art" ("Gothic Architecture" 281). This obvious distaste for the art of the Renaissance is no mere arbitrary dislike, but a prominent part of Morris's conception of the beginnings of capitalism. He elucidates this conception by pointing to a "Great Change" which engulfed Europe:

> Society was preparing for a complete recasting of its elements: the Medieval Society of Status was in process of transition into the modern Society of Contract.[47] New classes were being formed to fit the new system of production which was at the bottom of this … in short, the Age of Commercialism was being born. (280)

Curiously enough, when considering the *intellectual* effects of the Renaissance, Morris is not entirely negative. He seems momentarily "to have come not to bury the bourgeoisie but to praise it", as Marshall Berman has said of Marx (*All That Is Solid* 92). Morris does not go as far as Marx in his enthusiasm for bourgeois dynamism,[48] but in this instance it appears that he views its facilitation of intellectual and political freedom – at least during its infancy in the sixteenth century – as something of a positive development. Morris argues that while the new age of the Renaissance "was a source of misery and degradation to the world at the time, that it is still causing misery and degradation, and that as a system it is bound to give place to a better one", yet "it had a beneficent function to perform", and was "a necessary instrument for the development of freedom of thought and the capacities of man" ("Gothic Architecture" 282). It would, however, be a mistake to consider this an integral part of Morris's historical thought, or to conceive of it as one which significantly colours his perception of the sixteenth century. Indeed, in the only other instance where he advances such a view – arguing that "[b]etwixt the days in which we now live and the end of the Middle Ages, Europe has gained freedom

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[47] The notion of a historical change from a "Society of Status" to a "Society of Contract" was first advanced by the historian Henry Sumner Maine, in his book *Ancient Law* (1861).

[48] For a thorough and vivid exploration of Marx's admiration of this bourgeois dynamism, see pages 90-98 in Marshall Berman's book *All That is Solid Melts into Air* (1982).

of thought, increase of knowledge, and huge talent for dealing with the material forces of nature; comparative political freedom withal and respect for the lives of civilized men" – Morris makes it clear that this phase of advancement resulted ultimately in nothing more than a material move forward for the middle classes, and the middle classes alone. The intellectual and political gains of the Renaissance, Morris argues, pale in comparison to the historical catastrophe which is the ongoing oppression of the worker and the subsequent withering away of art: "if the present state of society is to endure, she has bought these gains at too high a price in the loss of the pleasure in daily work … the death of Art was too high a price to pay for the material prosperity of the middle classes" ("Art and Socialism" 203). So, while Morris does identify a modicum of historical progress during the era of the Renaissance, it is ultimately limited and exclusive – it is still the degradation of the worker, and the resulting decay of art, which remains Morris's primary focus, and which constitutes for him the overriding historical process at work in the sixteenth century.

Thus "to this living body of social, political, religious, scientific New Birth" ("Gothic Architecture" 282) was bound the lifeless art of the Renaissance. The most prominent characteristic of this lifeless art was, for Morris, its embrace of neoclassicism (283-284). Importantly, it was not classicism as the Greeks and Romans had known it, but a disfigured, displaced imitation, ending up ultimately as "an imitation of the Roman travesty of a Greek Temple" (284), which operated on "a tradition of dull respectability, or of foolish whims" (283).[49] For Morris, this classical revival is connected unequivocally with – is in fact *caused by* – a change in the style of working brought about by the birth of capitalism. "Beauty and romance were outside the aspirations of [sixteenth-century] builders", Morris declares. He continues:

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[49] Such antipathy to established artistic convention – especially the convention established by prominent Renaissance painters – also carries echoes of Morris's involvement with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood at an earlier point in his life. For an account of Morris's debt to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood see Peter Faulkner's article "Morris and Pre-Raphaelitism."

> Nor could it have been otherwise in those days; for, once again, architectural beauty is the result of the harmonious and intelligent co-operation of the whole body of people engaged in producing the work of the workman; and by the time that the changeling New Birth was grown to be a vigorous imp, such workmen no longer existed. By that time Europe had begun to transform the great army of artist-craftsmen … into an enormous stock of human machines, who had little chance of earning a bare livelihood if they lingered over their toil to think of what they were doing… (282-283)

As we have seen, Morris identified in the period surrounding the sixteenth century the transformation of hitherto independent, creative artisans and craftspeople into a mass of exploited, unthinking labour-power. Alongside that process he saw the resurrection of classicism, though in a disfigured, inauthentic form. These two phenomena he viewed as inextricably linked in a relationship of material cause and aesthetic effect: the robbery of the worker's creative power left an art governed entirely by pedantic yet pale imitations of cold, rigid classical forms. "[T]he people had ceased to be artists", Morris declared, "its masters were pedants" (282). As I will go on to show, Morris saw in these conditions, and the manifestation of those conditions in architecture, a re-emergence of the conditions of Greek and Roman slave societies, the original producers of classical architecture.

Of course, Morris was not the first to protest against the revival of classical principles in architecture, and neither was he the first to relate that revival to broader societal processes. In 1836, A. W. N. Pugin – designer, architect and architectural critic – published *Contrasts*, in which he argued that the embrace of neoclassicism in Europe which occurred as the result of the Renaissance was evidence not of a pan-European social or economic malaise – as it was for Morris – but a religious one. For Pugin, the revival of classical principles of design during the Renaissance, which occurred at the expense of the medieval Gothic, was the result of a widespread religious infidelity. The infidelity which Pugin had in mind was, specifically, the abandonment of traditional Catholic principles, which, for him, encompassed both post-Reformation Protestantism and the reformed Catholicism of the Counter-Reformation: "modern degeneracy", whether "in Protestant or Catholic

countries", will, for Pugin, "be found to proceed from the decay of true Catholic principles and practice" (v). The only acceptable form of Catholicism was, for Pugin, "Catholic truth … in her ancient solemn garb" (15) – the societies of the Counter-Reformation had "abandoned ancient traditions to follow the tide of innovations and paltry novelties", and in doing so had fallen prey to worldly corruption: "Is there a worldly hollow expedient started by some half-fledged sect of Protestants to collect cash, - it is often adopted." Even "the holy mysteries themselves have been made a vehicle for raising supplies" (56). This corruption and worldliness has led the once noble and venerable Catholic church to disguise itself in "*the modern externals of Pagan corruption*" (15).

Although opposed to the insufficiently Catholic societies of the Counter-Reformation as much as the Protestant nations of Europe, Pugin had a particular objection to the Reformation, especially the Reformation in England. Indeed, Pugin's focus in *Contrasts* is, on the whole, English – an Englishman himself (though paternally of French descent), Pugin believed that England was "once the brightest jewel in the crown of the [Catholic] Church" (9), and that it contained by far the most numerous and illuminating examples of medieval Catholic art (18). Thus the effects of the Reformation in England were, for Pugin, all the more painful to contemplate. Pugin's first objection to the Reformation in England was, of course, spiritual: it was an example of "decayed faith" (iv). However, like Cobbett, who had published his *History of the Protestant Reformation* only a decade before, Pugin also viewed the Reformation as a catastrophic event in England's political and social history. It represented the "will of a tyrant" (21), and had plunged English society into a "divided and distracted state" (iv). It must be remembered here that Pugin's political outlook was a conservative one – his ideal society, which was embodied in the society that produced the medieval Gothic, was one of cohesion, community (Wagner 15-18) and a paternal aristocracy ready and willing to fulfil its proper role as guardian and caretaker (20). Above all, Pugin desired a return to a "traditional, paternalistic, culturally insular, and inherently hierarchical" world (32).

The extent to which Pugin believed that English society had departed from this unified, ordered world – at first in a religious sense, but later in a social sense – is best demonstrated in his engraving in *Contrasts* comparing a medieval monastery and a nineteenth-century workhouse. The pre-Reformation Catholic monasteries were, for Pugin, institutions devoted firstly to the cultivation of knowledge and art, and secondly to the guardianship and instruction of the vulnerable: "it was through their boundless charity and hospitality the poor were entirely maintained" (22). Pugin, again like Cobbett, linked the dissolution of the monasteries with the rise of a cold and unfeeling utilitarian culture: in his engraving, a nineteenth century workhouse is shown as a prison-like panopticon, surrounded by muddy earth and high walls. The inhabitants have nowhere to sit but bare cells, are separated from their families, are given nothing but gruel to eat and are subject to the whims of a brutal master. In a final cruelty, their corpses are sold for dissection when they die. Directly below the depiction of the workhouse is portrayed a monastic institution of medieval England surrounded by plentiful greenery and pleasant, open surroundings. Here, the masters of the poor are benevolent and paternal, while the diet of the poor themselves consists of plentiful meat, ale and cheese. They receive regular edification from the priest, and when they die they are given a dignified Christian burial (103). The implication here is clear: where the social world of medieval Catholicism had consisted of ironclad, rigidly hierarchical social relations, enforcing, among other things, the paternal duties of the ruling class towards the poor, the society of the modern, post-Reformation world is one in which those set, hierarchical social relations have been obliterated, and therefore the absolute obligation of a paternalistic ruling class to care for the poor is done away with, to be replaced with uncaring cruelty and a total lack of charitable compassion. Pugin's attitude in this instance is, then, almost identical to Cobbett's: the past is articulated as a foil to the present – an exemplar of a society which approached more perfectly the ideal social order, against which the present appears sordid and degraded. Further, and again in a similar way to Cobbett, Pugin draws an unbroken

historical line from the specific historical moment in which that ideal society first began to disintegrate through the centuries which succeed it, right up to his own time: as far as he is concerned, nineteenth-century society is suffering from the same malaise as late sixteenth-century society was – a state of religious degeneracy resulting in a pervasive sense of social disorder (57).

Of course, as the engraving outlined above suggests, Pugin was particularly concerned with architecture as a manifestation of the state of English society. This was, as Alice Chandler has noted, an attitude "[r]eminiscent of Cobbett" (187) – unlike Cobbett, however, who saw in medieval buildings evidence of the superior material condition of the worker, Pugin was, of course, motivated by a conviction which was primarily religious in character. "As it is", he declared, "everything glorious about the English churches is Catholic, everything debased and hideous, Protestant" (52) This "controlling principle", as Raymond Williams has described it, insisted that "the architectural revival" – that is, the revival of Gothic architecture in the nineteenth century – "must be part of a general religious, and truly Catholic revival" (*Culture and Society* 138). Firstly, architectural beauty is derived, for Pugin, from "the fitness of the design to the purpose for which it is intended", so that "the spectator may at once perceive the purpose for which it was erected" (*Contrasts* 1). It follows, then, that an ecclesiastical building should express fully the "stupendous mysteries" of the true Catholic faith. Pugin sees the very form of Gothic architecture as "so glorious, so sublime, so perfect, that all the productions of ancient paganism sink … before it" (2). However, just as Pugin's criticism of the Reformation begins as a religious one but at points becomes social, so too, at times, does his praise of medieval Gothic architecture: his enthusiasm for these buildings echoes his admiration for the social relations which accompanied them. The benevolent Catholic monastery in the engraving discussed above, symbolic of societal cohesion and a paternal concern for the wellbeing of the poor, is very explicitly built in a Gothic style, complete with traceried windows, crenelated towers, pointed arches and a cruciform chapel. Gothic buildings are, for Pugin, expressive of "the faith, the

zeal, and above all, the *unity* of our ancestors" (6; emphasis added). It was that sense of total social unity which was one of the things Pugin most admired about medieval Catholic society

Against the religious and social perfection of the Gothic, Pugin contrasts the buildings of Renaissance neoclassicism. Pugin sees "all revived classic buildings" as "a lamentable departure from true Catholic principles and feelings" (7), and thunders that "every church that has been erected from St. Peter's at Rome downwards, are so many striking examples of the departure from pure Christian ideas and architecture" (9). Buildings which take as their model the societies of ancient Rome and Greece – societies which, at the height of their powers at least, worshipped multiple deities – represent, for Pugin, the embrace of Pagan heresies, offering "a perfect outrage to Christian feelings" (12). Importantly, Pugin connects neoclassicism with Protestantism, arguing that "Protestantism and revived Paganism [i.e. neoclassicism] both date from the same epoch, both spring from the same causes", those causes having their origin in the decline of "Catholic feelings" to a "very low ebb" (13). In other words, it was a general departure from true Catholicism which caused a general sense of religious apathy, and therefore facilitated a departure from true Christian architecture, giving rise ultimately to the degenerate neoclassicism of the Renaissance. This is, for Pugin, a process common to both the sixteenth century and the nineteenth: "There is a great deal of connexion", he writes, "between the gardens of the Medici, filled with Pagan luxury, and the Independent preaching-houses that now deface the land; for *both are utterly opposed to true Catholic principles, and neither could have existed had not those principles decayed*" (iv-v). Again, there is a hint of social criticism in this apparently religious argument: Pugin claims that "[t]he original classical societies – the "Pagan nations" as he calls them – were governed by "false and corrupt systems" (2). He also writes that "were it not beyond the limits of my subject, I could show that [neoclassicism] … is discernible in modern manners and government" (10). It is only really in his engravings, however, that Pugin connects neoclassicism with his general social criticisms

of the post-Reformation era, and once again it is basically in an implicit sense. In an engraving contrasting a “Catholic town in 1440” with “the same town in 1840” (131), the medieval town in question is replete with churches dedicated to saints, and the only sign of conflict is the city walls – otherwise, all is silent and harmonious. The nineteenth-century town, on the other hand, contains, alongside numerous chapels belonging to various Christian sects and denominations, symbols of general disorder and strife: a new panoptical jail and a lunatic asylum. Neither of these buildings is in an explicitly neoclassical style, but situated directly adjacent to them, in the foreground of the engraving (blocking out the church behind it), is a neatly proportioned house adorned with pilasters and pediments. Likewise, in an engraving contrasting a medieval with a modern cross (i.e. a market cross, or a structure meant to signify a central point within a particular locality), the modern cross, built in a neoclassical style, replete with pillars, rustication and balustrades, contains a police station – a symbol of social conflict. The medieval cross, meanwhile contains nothing more sinister than a passing monk (135). The juxtaposition, in these examples, of neoclassical architecture with signs of social disorder is clearly supposed to imply an association between neoclassical principles of design and political distress, though the nature of that association beyond Pugin’s general contempt for impious nineteenth-century society is only vaguely articulated, and his social criticism of neoclassicism remains relatively undeveloped.

Ultimately, then, Pugin anticipates Ruskin and Morris – but follows Cobbett – by linking the broader character of a society with the architecture which it produces, though he makes this link in a more sustained way than Cobbett does. Pugin likewise anticipates Ruskin and Morris in another way: he sees in the sixteenth century the beginnings in earnest of a profound and pervasive crisis affecting the whole of society, and he explicitly relates that crisis to the Renaissance, as well as the wider embrace of architectural neoclassicism which it encouraged. It is tempting to push Pugin further and cast him in the role of social critic, and indeed he does occasionally erupt into

protest at modern conditions. His social criticisms, however, are only made insofar as they relate to the matter of religion: the workhouse, the prison and the asylum are only abhorrent to Pugin because they are more broadly suggestive of a disorder of which the fundamental cause is religious infidelity. He is not interested in arguing in any other terms. When, in his engravings especially, Pugin seems to gesture at something beyond this religious fixation, it is only ever in a vague and ephemeral way.

Paul Meier suggests that a certain vital influence prevented Morris – who had, in his early youth, felt himself destined for a monastery (MacCarthy 67) – from reading, or at least adhering too closely to Pugin, whom Morris only ever refers to very occasionally and in passing. This influence was that of John Ruskin (Meier 1: 121). It was Ruskin in particular whom Morris claimed as his "master" in his pre-socialist years. Two years before his death in 1896, Morris declared that it was "through [Ruskin] that I learned to give form to my discontent" ("How I became a Socialist" 279). While they were not as close personal friends as were, for example, Ruskin and Edward Burne-Jones, they did maintain a long-lasting personal relationship (Faulkner, "Ruskin and Morris" 14). Though, as Kevin L. Morris suggests, Ruskin himself inherited from Pugin "the Romantic sacralisation of Gothic", he nonetheless "[rejected] his doctrine, which was generally taken to be quintessentially Catholic" (209). Ruskin maintains the religious element of Pugin's critique, arguing in his lecture "Traffic" (1864) that "good architecture is essentially religious – the production of a faithful and virtuous, not of an infidel and corrupted people" (89). However, as Alice Chandler has put it, Ruskin "is more concerned with the question of whether a man believes than what a man believes" (202). Raised in the Evangelical tradition, Ruskin was often hostile towards Catholicism – especially during his younger and middle years (Chapman 64) – and so he did not draw such a direct link as Pugin did between the particularities of faith and the particularities of architecture, the Gothic architecture which he so fervently praised being, very often, the work of Catholic builders and the product of Catholic societies. "Good architecture", for

him, “is the work of good and believing men” (“Traffic” 89). It is not merely the fact of being religious, however, which for Ruskin produces good architecture. Departing from an emphasis on pure religious doctrine, Ruskin instead emphasises ethics in a broad sense, declaring that it is a certain moral attitude which determines the form of the art of a society, and which its art reflects: “a nation cannot be affected by any vice, or weakness, without expressing it, legibly, and for ever, either in bad art, or by want of art; and … there is no national virtue, small or great, which is not manifestly expressed in all the art which circumstances enable the people possessing that virtue to produce (“Traffic” 79). The first quality that any society which seeks to produce good art must possess is that of religious unity: good architecture is “the manly language of a people inspired by resolute and common purpose, and rendering resolute and common fidelity to the legible laws of an undoubted God” (91). Pugin, of course, shared this belief, but Ruskin’s ethical emphasis means that for him its implication is different: universal devotion to the Christian God inspires a unique societal ethic – the ethic of the value of every human life. This ethic is explained in Ruskin’s famous work *The Stones of Venice*: “In the mediaeval, or especially Christian, system of ornament … slavery is done away with altogether; Christianity having recognized, in small things as well as great, the individual value of every soul.” For Ruskin, “the principal admirableness of the Gothic schools of architecture” is that “they thus receive the results of the labour of inferior minds” (2: 160). The superiority of Gothic architecture therefore lies in the fact that it places an inherent value on the creativity of the worker, who finds in the expression of that creativity a sense of freedom: “go forth again to gaze upon the old cathedral front … examine once more those ugly goblins, and formless monsters, and stern statues, anatomiless and rigid; but do not mock at them, for they are the signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone” (2: 163). Ruskin sees this freedom manifested especially in an artistic fidelity to nature, which is, for him, the natural outcome of creative freedom: “so soon as the workman is left free to represent what subjects he chooses, he must look to the nature that is

round him for material, and will endeavour to represent it as he sees it" (2: 181). Ruskin perceives this naturalistic quality – which is "indicative both of higher civilization and gentler temperament" (2: 200) – in Gothic architecture (2: 196), which is itself a manifestation of an "extreme love of truth". This love of truth is, further, "both increased and ennobled by … Christian humility" (2: 198) – as Francis O'Gorman has pointed out, "Imperfection and the failure to be ideal was part of the Gothic's essential nature" (388). Essentially, the freedom of the Gothic builders, which is consecrated by a pervasive Christian ethic, allows them to express the truth of their existence, which results in "a gradual and continual discovery of a beauty in natural forms" (Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* 2: 201). This expression is not bound by the arrogant pursuit of perfection but rather, through a Christian emphasis on humility, enfolds within it the divine truth of human imperfection.

Ruskin, like Pugin before him, conceived of Renaissance neoclassicism as a force which was destructive of the medieval Gothic spirit. In Ruskin's mind, however, the Renaissance, with its revival of strict classical forms,[50] heralded the destruction of his idea of the Gothic spirit of working, rather than any explicitly religious attitude. He declared that "the principal element in the Renaissance spirit is its firm confidence in its own wisdom" (2: 305), and accused it of an "unwholesome demand for *perfection* at any cost." This demand is entirely opposed to the Gothic spirit of working: for Ruskin, "perfection is *not* to be had from the general workman, but at the cost of everything, - of his whole life, thought, and energy" (3: 17). Importantly, Ruskin does not reject all Renaissance art. He admires the works of the Renaissance masters of painting and sculpture, but asserts that architecture requires the work of "meaner men, who, in the Gothic times, though in a rough way, would yet have found some means of speaking out what was in their hearts". In the

[50] As Richard Titlebaum notes in "John Ruskin and the Italian Renaissance", Ruskin was writing before widespread recognition of the fact that the Renaissance incorporated both adherence to, as well as adaptation and rejection of, classical models. As such, his conception of the Renaissance as a movement committed to strict adherence to classical rules is erroneous – although forgivably so (11).

hands of these men, Renaissance demands for perfection and precision result in work which is "utterly inanimate, - a base and helpless copy of more accomplished models; or, if not this, a mere accumulation of technical skill, in gaining which the workman had surrendered all other powers that were in him" (3: 18). The emphasis on perfection, further, fosters arrogance and pride: churches are "built to the glory of man, instead of the glory of God" (3: 123).

In the closing pages of *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin rounds on the Renaissance with a righteous fury. Echoing Pugin in the religious terms of his condemnation, he calls it "utterly devoid of all life, virtue, honourableness, or power of doing good. It is base, unnatural, unfruitful, unenjoyable, and impious. Pagan in its origin, proud and unholy in its revival". Significantly, he goes on to accuse it of being "paralysed in its old age" (3: 193) – for Ruskin, as for Pugin, the spirit of the Renaissance extends into the nineteenth century, where it has become an even more lifeless version of its origins:

> The modern mind differs from the Renaissance mind in that its learning is more substantial and extended, and its temper more humble; but its errors, with respect to the cultivation of art, are precisely the same ... We require, at present, from our general workmen, more perfect finish than was demanded in the most skilful Renaissance periods … and our leading principles in teaching … are, that the goodness of work consists primarily in firmness of handling and accuracy of science, that is to say, in hand-work and head-work; whereas heart-work, which is the *one* work we want, is not only independent of both, but often, in great degree, inconsistent with either. (3: 170)

For Ruskin, the prideful, lifeless spirit of the Renaissance has lived on to the nineteenth century, culminating in, amongst other things, the terraces of Gower Street (3: 6). As Richard Titlebaum has put it, Ruskin "could never forgive the Renaissance for having, as he saw it, plunged Europe into seemingly irreversible chaos" (14). As with Pugin and Morris, this critique has an element of social criticism to it. In the famous chapter of *The Stones of*

Venice entitled "The Nature of Gothic",[51] Ruskin erupts into violent scorn, not for the Venice of the Renaissance period but for the England of his own day:

> And now, reader, look round this English room of yours … Examine again all those accurate mouldings, and perfect polishings, and unerring adjustments of the seasoned wood and tempered steel … Alas! if read rightly, these perfectnesses are signs of a slavery in our England a thousand times more bitter and more degrading than that of the scourged African, or helot Greek. (2: 163)

There is, for Ruskin, the same spirit of perfectionism and pride in the England of the Industrial era as there was in the era of the Renaissance in Venice. That same spirit, further, has led to the same enslavement of the workers, who are "sent like fuel to feed the factory smoke, and the strength of them is given daily to be wasted into the fineness of a web, or racked into the exactness of a line" (2: 163).

As I have demonstrated, Ruskin saw the evil spirit of the Renaissance as something which was ultimately linked to the development of industrial capitalism, in which the worker was reduced to a mere cog in a machine, unthinking and unfeeling. But there is also the suggestion in his work that Ruskin conceived of the Renaissance as a resurrection not just of ancient ornamental styles but of ancient styles of working. In "The Nature of Gothic" he briefly sketches a portrait of the architectural labour of Greek and Assyrian workers: "The Greek gave the lower workman no subject which he could not perfectly execute. The Assyrian gave him subjects which he could only execute imperfectly, but fixed a legal standard for his imperfection. The workman was, in both systems, a slave" (2: 160). In other words, both Greek and Assyrian builders – thought of by the master-designer as "those beneath him" – had designs imposed on them from above which were to be adhered to absolutely, though that adherence was enforced by different means. Ruskin calls this system of building "servile ornament" (2: 159), a system which the medieval Gothic style of working entirely avoids through its focus on the value

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[51] Morris's Kelmscott Press published an edition of this chapter, which he called "one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century" ("Preface to the Nature of the Gothic" 292), in 1892.

of every living soul. While Ruskin does not explicitly link this ancient style of 'servile' working with the rigidly perfectionist style of working which was heralded by the Renaissance – he never actually states unequivocally that the latter is the re-emergence of the former – it is nonetheless the case that his notion of the ancient builder as an unthinking and unfeeling labourer, bound by an imperative of perfection, bears a notable similarity to his conception of both the Renaissance and the modern (i.e. nineteenth century) labourer as more or less the same. There is, in other words, the suggestion that history – or at least the history of architecture – is operating in a cyclical sense: that a form of architectural labour which had its origins in the ancient world can be somehow resurrected in a new form well over a millennium later, and that a similar malaise affects both.

This notion of the resurrection of an ancient slave society in the trend for neoclassicism is evident in Pugin's work too, though it is confined primarily to a religious objection to what he conceives of as 'Paganism', which is antithetical to true Christianity. There is no consideration of the place of the worker in the construction of ancient buildings, as in Ruskin, but only a general hatred for their religious beliefs and practices. Morris, on the other hand, takes on Ruskin's implicit suggestion of a returned classical slavery in the age of the Renaissance, but with a focus on more than just the work of the individual builder. It is true that, in "Gothic Architecture" for example, Morris advances a very similar argument to Ruskin when he asserts that "the form of the Greek temple was … the due expression of the exclusiveness and aristocratic arrogance of the ancient Greek mind, a natural result of which was a demand for pedantic perfection in all the parts and details of a building" (270). Ultimately, however, Morris – an atheist and thus free from Pugin and Ruskin's disdain for "Paganism" – places a firmly materialist emphasis on the class character of ancient societies; a character which, for him, returns with the rise of capitalism from the sixteenth century onwards. Morris is, of course, led to this particular modification of Ruskin's thought precisely because of the influence of figures like Marx and Bax. Taking Marx's firmly materialist

emphasis and Bax's notion of history as a spiral, Morris extracts Ruskin's implication that the builder working under capitalism suffers from a similar malaise as the builder working under the conditions of an ancient slave society and incorporates it into a greater structural conception of cyclical historical progress. At the same time, Morris widens Ruskin's focus to encompass not only the art produced by individuals working in slave societies but also the specific economic and class formations which make up those societies.

At certain points, Morris draws a connection between ancient slave societies and capitalist societies in a very explicit manner: in "True and False Society" he asserts that "under the quiet order and external stability of modern society … much the same thing is going on in the relations of employers to the employed as went on under the slave society of Athens…" (220). At other times, the connection is more implicit: in "Architecture and History", for example, Morris claims that "[i]n the classical period industrial production was chiefly carried on by slaves, whose persons and work alike belonged to their employers, and who were sustained at just such standard of life as suited the interest of the said employers" (301). Despite the fact that he is writing on the subject of ancient Greek slavery, Morris's vocabulary here is jarringly modern – he uses words like "industrial production" and "employers" – suggestive of a perceived link between the class composition of classical society and that of capitalist society. Indeed, just as classical "employers" owned both the work of their slaves and the slaves themselves, so the modern proletarian is essentially unfree: in his essay "Monopoly: or How Labour is Robbed" (1887), Morris says to his working-class audience, "My friend, because since you live by your labour, you are not free. And if you ask, Who is my master? who owns me? I answer *Monopoly*" (246). By "Monopoly" Morris meant the capitalist class, who "[sell] wares at an enhanced price without the seller having added any additional value to them" (247). Meanwhile, Morris's notion that classical slaves were kept at a living standard that served nothing more than the ends of their employers is reminiscent of his argument in "Useful Work versus Useless Toil" that "the wage-earners must always live as the wage-payers bid

them, and their very habits of life are *forced* on them by their masters" (104). Again, the vocabulary here is telling: it is, of course, slaves that have masters. A little further on in "Architecture and History", Morris asserts that "[t]he [ancient Greek] aristocracy … freed from the necessity of rough and exhausting work by their possession of chattel slaves, who did all that for them, and little oppressed with anxieties for their livelihood, had … both inclination and leisure to cultivate the higher intellectual arts" (301). Once again, this is very strongly suggestive of another judgement of capitalist society which Morris makes in "Monopoly" when he writes on the contrast between working class and bourgeois or upper-class education, stating that

> [the contrast] lies rather in the taste for reading and the habit of it, and the capacity for the enjoyment of refined thought and the expression of it, which the more expensive class really has … and which unhappily the working or un-expensive class lacks. The immediate reason for that lack I know well enough … it is the combined leisure and elbow-room which the expensive class considers its birthright … and which leisure and elbow-room the working class lacks… (240)

The implication here, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, is clear: the development of capitalist society since the sixteenth century constitutes, to a more than trivial degree, a kind of resurrection, though in a developed form, of the social conditions of classical slave-society. This is, of course, a notion entirely in keeping with the Baxian idea of history as spiral which, as I have shown, Morris absorbed and modified. For Morris, working with his Ruskinian (and, in a more oblique sense, Pugin-esque) reinterpretation of Bax, the embrace of classical architectural styles common to both societies is therefore explained by the distinctive (though not exact) similarity of their underlying material conditions, especially their class character and resulting labour relations.

With Ruskin and Pugin, then, Morris connects the decline of Gothic architecture and the development of Renaissance architecture with the degradation of the worker. For Pugin, the worker in question is the builder, who, in the time of the Gothic style's greatest glory, was a devout Catholic. The modern builder – the builder of the sixteenth century onwards – is by

contrast a mere infidel in a society of heretics, who expresses that infidelity through an embrace of Pagan neoclassicism, to the general degradation of the nation. For Ruskin, the position of the Gothic builder was not merely expressive of a sense of Catholic devotion, but of a general medieval Christian attitude which encouraged creativity, expressiveness, humility and a closeness with nature. These qualities were expressed in the very stones themselves, and with the rigid formality of the neoclassical Renaissance the worker was robbed of them entirely. Morris, like Pugin and Ruskin, reads into Gothic architecture a reflection of the moral state of the nation. Abandoning both Pugin and Ruskin's religious attitude, Morris nonetheless sees, with Ruskin, evidence of the freedom and creativity of the medieval worker in the florid but imperfect capitals and complex tracery of the medieval Gothic. Likewise, he sees – again with Ruskin – the Renaissance as concomitant with the stifling of that freedom and the transformation of the worker into a mere machine or tool, which continues into nineteenth-century society. Finally, developing Ruskin's hints on the subject, he connects the emergence of the Renaissance and of neoclassicism with a capitalist revival of the conditions of ancient slavery. Where Morris differs from Ruskin on this is indicative of his socialist background: his focus is on broader societal conditions – on questions of class, power and labour – which causes him to look to the social and economic conditions of society as a whole as the genesis for the art which it creates. Ruskin sees aesthetic classicism, and its revived spirit in the Renaissance, as *producing* a type of worker which is unthinking, unfeeling and unfree. This Renaissance spirit continues into, and is intensified in, the spirit of nineteenth-century industrialism. For Morris, the situation is reversed: it is the capitalist organisation of labour – which constitutes a return, in some form, of the classical conditions of slavery – that gives rise to the lifeless, dead architecture of the Renaissance, and which itself is a horrid reflection, rather than an instigator, of the plight of the unfree worker.

In Morris's identification of a revenant spirit of classical slavery in the conditions of capitalism he is, of course, adhering closely to the Baxian notion

of history as a spiral. Morris conceives of the sixteenth century, which heralded the advent of capitalism proper, as the beginning of a hard, four-hundred-year climb up the dark side of the mountain, around which the winding road of history leads. On the *other side* of the mountain, however, bright sunshine awaits. The grim reality of four centuries of capitalism is not, for Morris, a cause for despair. If history is indeed a spiral, then Morris can extend his conception of the development of capitalism – his synthesis of Marxism and Ruskin – into the future. Ruskin, at the end of *The Stones of Venice*, could only issue a call to return to Gothic styles of building (3: 194-197), and ultimately advocated a kind of semi-feudal paternalism.[52] Morris, on the other hand, could anticipate the revival of the spirit of the Gothic in a new form, as part of the cycle of growth and decay which characterised the movement of history:

> when the modern world finds that … it needs and will have a style of architecture which … can only be as part of a change as wide and deep as that which destroyed Feudalism; when it has come to that conclusion, the style of architecture will have to be historic in the true sense; it will not be able to dispense with tradition; it cannot begin at least with doing something quite different from anything that has been done before; yet whatever the form of it may be, the spirit of it will be sympathy with the needs and aspirations of its own time, not simulation of needs and aspirations passed away. Thus it will remember the history of the past, make history in the present, and teach history in the future. As to the form of it, I see nothing for it but that the form, as well as the spirit, must be Gothic; an organic style cannot spring out of an eclectic one, but only from an organic one. ("Architecture and History" 285)

That spirit – a spirit which had its most recent and most developed appearance in the medieval guilds of craft – was to be recreated by socialist economic organisation, but was also to have its own expression in a regenerated and revived sense of freedom and creativity.

Vitally, Morris conceived of his own historical writing not only as a contribution to the study of history in an abstract sense, but also as part and parcel of the material project of advancing socialism, through which the revived

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[52] See Ruskin's essays on political economy, collectively entitled *Unto This Last* (1860).

Gothic spirit outlined above might be actually brought into being. Indeed, in this sense Morris the socialist medievalist had a similar aim to Cobbett, especially in his writing for the *Commonweal*, in which much of his historical work appeared. As Michael Holzman observes, Morris's goal in this task was "to bring knowledge about their situation and its history to 'the poor'" (104). Like Cobbett, Morris wanted to use history as a tool in the raising of proletarian consciousness, attempting to communicate to the working class what they had lost, and what they stood to gain.

Of course, Morris's conception of the historical development of capitalism and its relation to the decline of feudalism is very different in character from Cobbett's: where Cobbett's is linear, Morris's is cyclical; where Cobbett's is catastrophist, Morris's is gradual; where Cobbett's is narrow, Morris's is broad. Moreover, Cobbett was unable to see in his conception of history any kind of comprehensive vision for a transformed future. The focus of his politics was not the creation of a fundamentally new society, as it was with Morris, but a kind of reclamation. While Cobbett did not desire a wholesale return to the past, he nonetheless wished to see the reinstatement of those seemingly ironclad, albeit rudimentary rights and comforts which (as Cobbett saw it) the labourer had enjoyed before the rise of agricultural capitalism: a degree of security on the land, economic stability, plentiful and nourishing victuals, a relatively respectful relationship between employer and worker. Cobbett could rage with considerable force against the deprivation of these fundamental rights and comforts, using them as models to condemn the position of labourers in the early nineteenth century. Ultimately, however, Cobbett desired nothing more or less from the future than the reclamation of what had been lost – the overall form which that reclamation should take was not something that he ever fully delineated.

There is, nonetheless, a remarkable point of alignment between Cobbett and Morris, which serves to provide a new view of Morris as historian. This view sees Morris as, if not a straightforwardly Cobbettian historian of capitalism, then certainly a writer of history whose image of the development

of capitalism possesses a significant Cobbettian dimension. The point of alignment in question is to be found in Cobbett's and Morris's shared belief that it was in the tumultuous and dramatic history of the sixteenth century that one could locate the beginnings in earnest of a process which impoverished the labourer, placed self-interest at the centre of ethical life and disrupted forever the feudal society which had endured for hundreds of years before it. Though that belief was articulated with differing degrees of complexity and in relation to different conceptions of historical change, it still constituted a vital element of both the Cobbettian and the Morrisian visions of the history of capitalist society.

Such a focus on the progress and events of history, so important to both Cobbett and Morris, was essentially alien to the Welsh industrialist and radical utopian Robert Owen. For Owen – who, alongside Morris, is the subject of the next chapter – the life of the past (and much of the present) constituted not much more than a prolonged reign of unreason and confusion preceding the advent of his own perfect new moral world. Indeed, as Owen saw it, this new world, which would end forever the numberless years of conflict, suffering and waste, was on the very brink of being realised.

Robert Owen, William Morris and the Depiction of a Revolutionary Working Class

Section I: Proletarian Autonomy and Peaceful Militarism in the Work of Robert Owen

In the introduction to his autobiography, written in the ninth and final decade of his life, Robert Owen declared that "[t]he following pages contain the history, step by step, of the progress of the mission to prepare the population of the world for [a] great and glorious change" (xi). Whereas, as will be seen, William Morris maintained a Marxist focus on the activity of the organised working class as the primary and necessary engine of political change, Owen had, by these years, come to view the entire course of his own life as not just in parallel with the development of his new moral world, but as its driving force. This world was to be one in which the productive power of labour would be vastly increased by its organisation along the lines of common interest rather than individual competition, in which the instincts of jealousy, violence and selfishness would be utterly eradicated, and in which all humanity would conceive of itself as one unified whole, whose ultimate goal was universal happiness. This was to be achieved firstly through a programme of education, secondly through the material reorganisation of people – particularly their labour and their living conditions – and thirdly through fundamental changes in the structure and nature of government. In his mind, Owen alone, or rather Owen's ideas alone, were capable of rescuing humanity from a disordered, irrational and cruel state of exploitation and ignorance, and granting it a new state of existence: serene, rational and hyper-productive.

Of course, Owen was more than what he would have referred to disdainfully as a "mere closet theorist". He viewed himself rather as a "practical economist" ("Report to the County" 265), a view which does have some basis in reality. The life which ultimately led Owen to wild proclamations and

otherworldly delusions[53] was a varied one, by no means the privileged life of a cosseted intellectual. Like William Cobbett, who famously denounced Owen's plans for "parallelograms of paupers" (qtd. in Thompson*, Making* 860), Owen came from a relatively humble background – he was born in 1771 in the small Welsh market town of Newtown, in the house above his father's shop, and began his working life as a saddler's apprentice (Donnachie 2). Like William Morris, meanwhile, Owen was to become a businessman and an employer. Owen, for his part, had very great success in business,[54] especially during his early life and middle age, amassing vast sums of wealth from his ventures in the cotton trade. Indeed, Owen is usually remembered by the lay person for his management of New Lanark, a cotton mill on the River Clyde. Founded in 1786 by the paternalist businessman David Dale (Owen's future father-in-law), the isolated mill and its employees, all of whom both lived and worked within its grounds, would become a kind of grand laboratory in which Owen, in the tradition of industrial paternalism (Donnachie 170), could test his early notions of education and cooperation upon living subjects (Owen himself referred to New Lanark as his "experiment" ("New View" 26)).

These early notions were founded upon one key idea, which Owen arrived at early, from which he never departed, and which formed the keystone of all the rest of his political thought: that, as he put it in his most well-known work *A New View of Society* (1813), "character is universally formed for, and not by, the individual" (110).[55] From this he extrapolated further principles, for example:

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[53] In the latter portion of his life, Owen insisted that he was able to communicate with the spirits of the dead, and that he was indeed capable of holding extensive conversations with them. He even believed that they were "actively engaged" in bringing his vision of society to fruition (Owen, *Life of Robert Owen* 316).

[54] For a comprehensive account of Owen as a businessman and mill owner, see A. J. Robertson's "Robert Owen, Cotton Spinner: New Lanark, 1800-1825".

[55] Of course, Owen was far from the first to have this idea. It is at least as old as Rousseau, and indeed numerous critics have identified a link between Rousseau and Owen (Harrison, "A New View" 4; Podmore 646; McGrail 257). It is nonetheless the case that, whether Owen read Rousseau's work directly or whether, as J. F. C. Harrison argues, Owen's ideas on this subject emerged "as part of the whole complex of ideas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" ("A New View" 4) (ideas

> any community may be arranged … in such a manner, as not only to withdraw vice, poverty, and, in a great degree, misery, from the world, but also to place every individual under circumstances in which he shall enjoy more permanent happiness than can be given to any individual under the principles which have hitherto regulated society. (110)

These extrapolations were to result in the emergence of what was for Owen an all-encompassing political vision, the details of which I will illustrate and engage with at a later point in this section. At New Lanark, however, it was primarily his first principle of the formation of character which Owen sought to put into practice. He wanted to reform completely the workers of New Lanark, who, when he had found them, "possessed almost all the vices and very few of the virtues of a social community" ("New View" 30). Against these vices, as he saw them, Owen introduced a programme of moral and practical reform. He improved the housing and streets, instituted a new rehabilitative system of justice and opened a shop which, through the exploitation of economies of scale, was able to sell provisions at drastically reduced prices. He also took young children out of the mill and into on-site educational establishments, where they had instilled into them a communal ethic of collective happiness and mutual respect, and were encouraged to exercise their rational faculties, rather than being subjected to simple rote-learning. Indeed, for Owen these New Lanark children would form the bedrock of a new and better society in miniature (41). Owen appears to have achieved a measure of success in this enterprise as far as the workers of New Lanark are concerned, both by his own account ("New View" 35), and by those of his contemporaries: roughly 20,000 visitors "came to gape at New Lanark between 1815-1825", and most were apparently impressed by what they saw (Donnachie 171). Indeed, Raymond Williams has called New Lanark "so great a positive human achievement as to

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which he is likely to have come into contact with during his membership of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society in the 1790s (see Donnachie 59-63)), Owen nowhere acknowledges the influence of Rousseau in the formation of his ideas. Indeed, Owen does not acknowledge *any* influences at all, maintaining throughout his life that his ideas were the result of practical experience alone, leading Edward Royle to observe that "Robert Owen is like a book without footnotes" (7).

be virtually incredible, in such a field, in the years between the Luddites and Peterloo" (*Culture and Society* 45).

Aside from New Lanark, Owen was involved in a number of other practical projects, from legislative reform and government lobbying to the establishment of experimental communities and co-operative societies. Unlike Morris, whose political activity was predominantly focussed around the core tenets of education, agitation and organisation, Owen's sphere of political action was extremely broad. He was involved in the first attempt to legislate against child labour, resulting in the substantially watered-down and deeply disappointing (for Owen) Factory Act of 1819. He persistently petitioned any governmental body or prominent political figure that would listen to him, attempting to impress upon them the truth of his notions about the formation of character and the necessity of the adoption of whichever political scheme he was currently advocating, often to the polite bemusement of the person or party in question. In the United States, in the 1820s, Owen spearheaded the establishment of an Owenite community at New Harmony, Indiana, which ultimately collapsed, taking much of Owen's vast fortune with it. He was later connected with the establishment of two other Owenite communities, both also doomed to failure, at Orbiston, on the River Clyde, and at Queenwood in Hampshire. In 1834, he was instrumental in the foundation of the first national confederation of trade unions, the ill-fated Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, though he remained throughout his life suspicious of any working-class organisation which sought to further its own prospects via its own means.

Apart from the brief treatment above, I do not intend to dwell on Owen's activities at New Lanark,[56] nor his various other ventures and experiments.[57] Owen is very often studied by historians rather than literary critics, especially historians of British socialism, who naturally take more of a scholarly interest in the concrete details of Owen's life and works, as well as the importance of Owen's example in the creation of various Owenite and co-operative movements in Britain, which would go on to grow and flourish independently of Owen himself.[58] Though these details are important and profoundly interesting facets of Owen's overall political project, I intend here to maintain a focus on the nature of the transformed society Owen wanted to bring into being – on his utopia.

Of course, Owen is a particular kind of utopian writer. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Marx and Engels considered Owen to be a utopian in the precise sense of being a utopian socialist: able to perceive the inherent problems of capitalist society, but unable to conceive of the resolution of those problems through any means but the enactment *en masse* of his own particular scheme. But Owen is also utopian in a slightly wider sense, in that he fits into a certain genre of utopia which Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel identify as having its origins in the late eighteenth century: not a dream of unattainable perfection or an imagined land of plenty but a "rationalist, systematic" utopia, in which "the means of reaching utopia" becomes not "an adventure story or a

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[56] In his autobiography, Owen claimed that New Lanark was by no means a straightforward physical manifestation of his political thought. He wrote: "Let it therefore be kept in everlasting remembrance, that that which I effected at New Lanark was only the best I could accomplish under the circumstances of an ill-arranged manufactory and village, which existed before I undertook the government of the establishment" (110).

[57] For extended analyses of these aspects of Owen's life and work, see, among others, Edward Royle's *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, Ian Donnachie's biography of Owen entitled *Robert Owen: Owen of New Lanark and New Harmony*, and J. F. C. Harrison's *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America*.

[58] For details of this see Eileen Yeo's article "Robert Owen and Radical Culture", as well as E. P. Thompson's chapter on Owen and Owenism in *The Making of the English Working Class* and, again, J. F. C. Harrison's *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America*.

rite de passage into Elysium" but "a question of political action". In this genre of utopia, the issues of "revolution, evolution, the uses of violence, the mechanics of the propagation of a new faith, determinism and free will, the imperatives of blind historical destiny, and the requirements of human freedom [become] intrinsic to utopian thought" (3). As will be seen, all of these issues are of vital importance to Owen's utopian vision, just as they are to William Morris's various visions of the long realisation of communist society, as I will discuss in the next section of this chapter. Moreover, the way in which the above mode of utopian thought considers the question of the realisation of utopia to be of equal or perhaps greater importance to that of the nature of utopia itself is very much reflected in Owen's work. Indeed, Krishan Kumar, in his history of modern utopian and anti-utopian thought, has referred to Owen as one of the "great system-builders of the [nineteenth] century" for whom "it seemed self-evident that utopia was on the point of realization" (48). As a result, the question of the path to utopia – or the building of the system – is of fundamental importance in his work, and it is predominantly this question on which this section will focus.

A particular benefit of Owen's proselytising disposition, at least as far as the scholar of Owen is concerned, is that he left behind him innumerable written accounts both of his utopia, and of the processes of its creation, with the latter being certainly the most widely debated aspect of Owen's vision (though as I will go on to discuss, it is sometimes difficult with Owen to distinguish the means from the ends). The certainty with which Owen believed that his system alone could bring humanity to salvation, his willingness to appeal to royalty, nobility and the upper echelons of the industrial bourgeoisie in its implementation and his desire to manipulate and reorganise the working classes in accordance with what he believed was in their best interests has led many historians to portray him as something of a well-intentioned autocrat, more in the vein of a paternalist mill-owner than a champion of the workers, whose "chief reason for being a Socialist was the desire that [the working class] should be abolished" (Thompson, *Making* 864). This suspicion is not

limited to modern historians – as will be seen, many of Owen's radical contemporaries directed this same criticism at him while he was alive. Meanwhile, other historians like J. F. C. Harrison and, more recently, Gregory Claeys, have taken the view that, though Owen may have had autocratic tendencies, nonetheless his aims were ultimately democratic – that he wished to dissolve arbitrary hierarchies and oppressive institutions, and that he took care to call for the implementation of this principle to some degree at every stage of the construction of his new moral world.

The thread which seems to run throughout the debate surrounding Owen's paternalist or autocratic tendencies – a debate which has seen Owen compared to figures ranging from Victor Frankenstein[59] to Tony Blair[60] – is the question of proletarian autonomy: to what degree, in Owen's creative vision of the making of his imagined future, were members of the working class *themselves* given the opportunity to form society in accordance with their own wishes, and under their own power? Were they simply objects to be moved about and arranged in the most rational way, and if so, in what ways were they to be organised? In addressing these questions, I want to echo one of Gregory Claeys's criticisms of the argument that Owen was a straightforward autocrat: that of "imprecise terminology" ("Paternalism and Democracy" 163). The charge of "authoritarianism" levelled at Owen by critics such as Raymond Williams, who also calls Owen "firmly paternalist" (*Culture and Society* 43), while accurate in many senses, seems too narrow to describe the complex and changeable nature of the various roles Owen had in mind for the working class, and the ways in which he imagined its members achieving in the end a comfortable, productive, fully egalitarian and truly happy existence. A greater degree of nuance is needed.

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[59] See Robert Anderson's "'Misery Made Me a Fiend': Social Reproduction in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Owen's Early Writings".

[60] See Ian Donnachie and Gerry Mooney's "From Owenite Socialism to Blairite Socialism: Utopia and Dystopia in Robert Owen and New Labour", as well as Brian McGrail's "Owen, Blair and Utopian Socialism: On the Post- Apocalyptic Reformulation of Marx and Engels".

In contributing to this debate, I want to argue that there is a hitherto unidentified aspect of the way in which Owen imagines the role of the working class in the creation of the ideal society, which is the product of an irreconcilable tension in Owen's conception of the working class. This tension is between two different images of the working class which Owen constructs: one of that class as it presently exists – a shiftless, violent and irrational class, an object mostly of pity, to be controlled and directed – and the other as it could exist – as it *will* exist – upon the arrival of utopia: the beneficent, rational, hyper-productive super-being of the future. The product of this tension in Owen's thought might be succinctly defined as a militaristic tendency. By this is not meant militarism in a warlike or violent sense, but rather the militarisation of everyday life, in pursuit of the ideal socialist society: the introduction and imposition of, among other things, militaristic routines, methods, environments and social organisations. This tendency is, at its heart, something more than mere autocracy – as part of his vision of the achievement of his new system, Owen constructed an image of a working class which not only submitted itself to his schemes and was obedient to his decrees in a broad sense, but which was actually organised in the manner of an armed force: moving in disciplined unison, a well-trained army of labour, loyal to the unit as a whole above any notion of individual gain. At times, he even imagined himself as something of a Napoleonic grand general – as opposed to a benevolent paternalist or rational legislator – engaged in holy war against an ancient enemy on behalf of those he led, who, if they only followed his lead, would have the entire world to gain.

In this way I want to explore with greater nuance the question of proletarian self-direction in the creation of Owen's ideal society – to insist that Owen was neither an authoritarian paternalist nor a radical democrat, and that in fact such a dichotomy is unfit to accurately describe Owen's attitude towards the working class of early nineteenth-century Britain. Instead, I want to argue that, in this important but hitherto unexplored respect especially, the role Owen imagined for the working class in the creation of utopia was one in which its

agency – that is, its capacity to effect change through action – was significantly increased, but at the cost of its autonomy, or its ability to direct itself towards its own ends. Fundamentally, Owen conceived of a working class which was empowered to create a world for itself, but which, in the use of that power, required direction, organisation and control.

Owen's New Moral World

In order to examine the role which Owen imagined for the working class in the creation of his new world, it is first necessary to understand the nature and organisation of that world as Owen conceived of it. As might be expected, Owen did not simply conjure it up apropos of nothing – it was, as most utopias are, designed specifically to *counteract* something. In his *Manifesto of Robert Owen* (1840), written late in his life, he declared that "[t]he New Moral and Sane System cannot otherwise interfere with the old immoral and insane system of the world, than by causing its gradual and peaceable destruction and entire annihilation" (11). Indeed, much of this *Manifesto* consists not of positive declarations but negative ones – of specifying what the new world will *not* be: it shall "open the eyes of all to the past and present degradation of the human race ;-—to the gross folly and absurdity of all its institutions"; it shall possess "powers as shall speedily terminate the ignorance, Violence, and wars, of the human race ;—stay the progress of poverty, and destroy all future fear of it … and remove all other causes which have hitherto divided man from man" (9).

Specifically, Owen wanted to design a political system to supersede the *laissez-faire* form of capitalism, manifested in the prime directive "to buy cheap and sell dear" (Owen, *Life of Robert Owen* 122), which he saw as the reigning ideology of his time. "Under this [*laissez-faire*] system", Owen wrote in his autobiography, "there can be no true civilization; for by it all are trained civilly to oppose and often to destroy one another by their created opposition of interests" (123). This is, in part, the familiar objection to capitalist society which

Raymond Williams traces back to Coleridge in his book *Culture and Society*. Capitalism, and its attendant philosophy of free and unfettered competition between individuals, is objected to because it is opposed, in Coleridge's words, to "the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity" (qtd. in Williams 76). Williams identifies this concept as, specifically, "the *social* conditions of man's perfection" (76). Williams goes on to show how this concept goes on to develop into a broader notion of culture, which is the focus of his book. For Owen, however, the objection leads to a different conclusion. His complaint is similar in character: *laissez-faire* capitalism is detrimental to "[t]ruth, honesty" and "virtue", and it impedes the development of "superior character". Elsewhere, in earlier essays such as "Observations on the Effect of the Manufacturing System" (1815), Owen claims that the manufacturing system "generates a new character in its inhabitants" which is "formed upon a principle quite unfavourable to individual and general happiness": "a disposition which strongly impels its possessors to sacrifice the best feelings of human nature to [a] love of accumulation" (121). Nonetheless, Owen's response to these objections should be distinguished from that of Coleridge: rather than moving towards an entirely cultural solution – that is, a solution based primarily on the cultivation and propagation of existing art and knowledge, with little emphasis on material factors or total reorganisation – Owen's emphasis is grounded in material circumstance. Indeed, unlike William Morris – who, as I have shown in the previous chapter, maintained both a material *and* a cultural focus simultaneously – Owen is hardly concerned with questions of art or aesthetics at all. It is, as will be seen, almost entirely through the vastly increased production and radical redistribution of wealth, as well as through a planned system of comprehensive moral education, that Owen seeks to eradicate the conflict and degradation of *laissez-faire* capitalist individualism and bring into being a truly productive and universally contented humanity.

Owen's ultimate object was nothing less than universal happiness. In his "Report to the County of Lanark" (1820) he states that "[t]he great object of

society is, to obtain wealth, and to enjoy it" (262). As will be seen, Owen believed he had correctly ascertained the means to obtain wealth in abundance – it was the enjoyment of it which was to be the crowning achievement of his new world. This aim was one which, like his principle of the formation of character, he adopted early, and which he never abandoned. In his "Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark" (1816) – first delivered as a speech directly to the workers of New Lanark – he declared that "the New System is founded on principles which will enable mankind to *prevent*, in the rising generation, almost all, if not all of the evils and miseries which we and our forefathers have experienced." Under this system, Owen continued,

> A correct knowledge of human nature will be acquired; ignorance will be removed; the angry passions will be prevented from gaining any strength; charity and kindness will universally prevail; poverty will not be known; the interest of each individual will be in strict unison with the interest of every individual in the world. There will not be any counteraction of wishes and desires among men. Temperance and simplicity of manners will be the characteristics of every part of society. The natural defects of the few will be amply compensated by the increased attention and kindness towards them of the many. None will have cause to complain; for each will possess, without injury to another, all that can tend to his comfort, his well-being, and his happiness. (113)

Such a passage has all the hallmarks of a religious proclamation: the acknowledgement and promised negation of existing maladies on the one hand, the promise of hitherto impossible heights of happiness and contentment on the other. It is the existence of such a messianic dimension in Owen's work which has caused many critics and historians to place Owen within or in relation to the millennialist Christian tradition – that is, certain Christian denominations and sects, very prominent in the early nineteenth century, which prophesied the imminent arrival of a thousand-year golden age before the final judgement of the world.[61] Certainly, given Owen's characterisation of

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[61] For in-depth analyses of Owen's millennialist tendencies, see firstly J. F. C. Harrison's *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America*, as well as Edward Royle's *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium* and W. H. Oliver's "Owen in 1817: The Millennialist Moment".

his imagined new world as some kind of harmonious heavenly sphere, coupled with his childhood enthusiasm for religion (Donnachie 11), such a dimension is difficult to ignore. At the same time, however, Owen's imagined world evidently incorporates some of the characteristics of Benthamite[62] Utilitarianism.[63] As J. F. C. Harrison observes, "Owen declared happiness to be the end of living in the sense that happiness is a condition of man's self-realization as a complete human being". "Realizing that ethically this was inadequate," Harrison continues, "Owen coupled it with a belief that man should live for others as well as himself; the individual has a duty to live for the happiness of the greatest number, and in doing so he will also promote his own highest happiness" (*Robert Owen and the Owenites* 48). Essentially, Owen combined the Utilitarian focus on the propagation of maximum happiness in the greatest number of private individuals with an ethical emphasis on mutual enrichment and collective happiness – that is, the happiness of society as one organism. As Harrison points out, this ethical system is somewhat paradoxical (48) – an emphasis at once on individual happiness and on the amalgamation of individual interest into a collective one – but these apparently conflicting concepts are nonetheless the guiding principles of Owen's political vision. Whether in the individual, or in society at large, Owen's ultimate goal was, quite simply, universal happiness.

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[62] Owen was acquainted with Jeremy Bentham – indeed, Bentham bought a single share in Owen's New Lanark establishment. Owen, however, was at best condescending in his treatment of Bentham, while Bentham, for his part, never visited New Lanark himself. Owen claimed in his autobiography that Bentham had "spent a long life in an endeavour to amend laws, all based on a fundamental error." This error was that, although he had been "occupied in showing and attempting to remedy the evils of individual laws", yet he had "never [attempted] to dive to the foundation of all laws, and thus [ascertain] the cause of the errors and evils of them" (132). Owen does not specify what this foundation is, though given his insistence elsewhere of its primacy in all things, it is likely to be a reference to his notions regarding the formation of character.

[63] It may seem odd for Owen to combine the tradition of fevered religious prophecy with the kind of eighteenth century rationalism represented by Utilitarianism. However, As W. H. Oliver points out in "Owen in 1817: The Millennialist Moment", the two modes of thinking were very often far more convergent than is usually thought.

That universal happiness was, of course, to be constituted in certain overarching characteristics. The first of these would be, as we have seen, a collective ethic. By this is meant simply an ethic which conceives of humanity as inherently social, or reliant ultimately on co-operation, mutual aid and community, and which thus enshrines the safeguarding and promotion of these characteristics as the primary ethical goal. This is, of course, in opposition to the individualist ethic, which would claim that the ultimate responsibility of each person is to him or herself only, and that the point of ethics is to guarantee the rights and freedoms of the individual as it is engaged in competition with other individuals.[64] In his *Manifesto*, Owen "[proposes], for the adoption of all people and nations, another System of Society". This system will be "a System in which *each will assist all, and all will assist each*" (8; Owen's emphasis). The second characteristic was a universal rationality – the removal of all barriers, in all members of society, to the utterly unobstructed exercise of pure reason. This would lead naturally, for Owen, to harmonious – because untainted by prejudice or ignorance – relations between individual members of the collective society: the new system will "create a rational *will* and a charitable *spirit* in all of human kind, and thus induce each, by an irresistible necessity, to become kind, just, consistent, and rational, in mind and conduct…" (8-9). It will, further, replace old religious, political and social institutions with new ones – "institutions based upon fundamental principles consistent with every known fact, and in harmony with all nature" (9). Both the collective ethic and the characteristic of universal rationality would be expressed in (as well as, as will be seen, facilitated by) an increase in all the productive and intellectual faculties of humanity: the new system will "call into action, under a right and most beneficial direction, not only the illimitable powers of mechanism, chemistry, &c., but also the incalculable, dormant, physical, intellectual, moral,

[64] This tension between notions of individualism and collectivism would be developed at much greater length later in the nineteenth century, as is made clear in *Herbert Spencer and the Limits of the State: The Late Nineteenth-Century Debate Between Individualism and Collectivism*, an anthology of nineteenth-century writing on the subject edited by Michael Taylor.

and practical energies of the human race, hitherto depressed and oppressed by ignorance and superstition" (8). Indeed, not only will Owen's new world "introduce never-failing abundance of all that is necessary for the health and highest enjoyment of man", but, in a distinctly Morrisian turn, it will "give him great pleasure in its daily production" (9). It is important to emphasise here that, for Owen, the increase of wealth and knowledge are not ends in themselves, but are in fact inextricable from – are indeed part and parcel of – the general ethical and social change from individualism to collectivism (albeit collectivism which would at the same time enrich the individual): the system is "admirably calculated to produce the *most* knowledge, unity, wealth, charity, kindness, and happiness" (8). Owen explicitly groups ethical and social improvements together with material and intellectual ones because, for him, each is expressive of, and conducive towards the development of the others.

Owen's messianic proclamations, grand ethical principles and confident predictions of abundance would appear to suggest that, contrary to my earlier claims, he was not at all concerned with the more practical details of administration and government. This is very far from the case – Owen wrote a vast amount on the vital questions of land ownership, housing, education, government and, of course, labour. Indeed, Owen far outpaces Morris in this respect, who, aside from his utopian novel *News from Nowhere* (which, as I have noted, should not be taken as a straightforward blueprint), hesitated to map out any comprehensive and practical vision of a future communist society. Owen, unlike Morris, was an inveterate planner. A problem arises, however, in ascertaining the nature of these extensive and detailed plans: were they, in Owen's vision, the means to an end, or did they constitute a part of the end itself? This distinction is sometimes difficult to make. For example, Owen advocated, as will be seen, the establishment and propagation of 'villages of cooperation', but whether the desired end was to be simply the proliferation of these villages, or settlements like them, across the earth entire, or whether they were to be only a step on the road to universal happiness, to be abandoned once that goal had been reached, Owen never finally made clear.

Though it is important to recognise that this ambiguity remains at least partially unresolved, I will in the following pages be treating Owen's detailed plans and schemes as primarily the imagined *means* to his desired new world, rather than as constituting that world itself, while acknowledging the occasional difficulty in distinguishing between the two. This is due to a statement of Owen's: he writes in his *Report to the County of Lanark* that his practical plans are to constitute an "intermediate stage of society" (277), and are "preparatory", a word which he uses because "the present state of society, *governed by circumstances*, is so different … from that which will arise when society shall be taught to *govern circumstances*, that some temporary intermediate arrangements, to serve as a step whereby we may advance from the one to the other, will be necessary" (273). Nonetheless, it is important not to take Owen entirely on his word – as I will go on to demonstrate, Owen's actual proclamations sometimes contradict his intention merely to bring about an "interim" phase – especially because the difficulty in distinguishing Owen's means from his ends is central to the debate surrounding Owen's autocratic tendencies.

Whether means or ends, it is important to recognise that Owen's proposals were, in the first instance, essentially material. He did not imagine the introduction of any kind of overarching cultural or ethical change without first confronting the reality of everyday existence. It was, for Owen, the fine details of circumstance which determined the whole character of each person, and it was thus in the transformation of those circumstances on a larger scale that the great change from individualism and conflict to collectivism and harmony was to be brought about. The process by which utopia would be reached, as Owen conceived of it, would then have to begin with the matters of labour, housing and education.

Material Proposals

It is the achievement of a state of universal happiness which is the apotheosis of Owen's imagined new world. All his proposed reforms, at every scale, tend towards the establishment of this state of being. In the previous chapter, I argued that William Morris took as his ultimate goal the universal adoption of a particular emotional state, which was a state in which all facets of life become essentially pleasurable. In this respect, Owen and Morris are similar: like Morris, Owen – for all his ideas for material reform – wanted finally to achieve the collective assumption of an affective state, which in Owen's case was universal happiness. From his early writings in *A New View of Society*, in which he declared that his ideas regarding education would mean that "human happiness will be speedily established on a rock from whence it shall never more be removed" (65), to his autobiography, in which he announced an intention to "commence the most important experiment for the happiness of the human race that had yet been instituted at any time in any part of the world" (82), Owen always aimed resolutely at this single ultimate purpose.

Of course, happiness, for Owen, was not a simple matter of changing attitudes. In his vision of the future, universal happiness would first take root in the kitchen, the field and the school. Thus he was driven to imagine, in the creation of his new world, planned communities – illustrative microcosms of the world to come – the focus of which was the optimisation of material circumstance. This material focus might seem jarring given the messianic dimensions of Owen's vision – the promised paradise on one hand, the preparation of food on the other. This is, indeed, a central characteristic of Owen's conception of the road to utopia: as will be seen, the gap, for Owen, between careful material adjustments and the assumption of a state of collective bliss is practically non-existent. Such a fantastical leap has an important implication for those who are to perform it, which is that working-class autonomy in fact figures very little in the creation of Owen's new world. If all that is required for the realisation of a world of peace, equality,

communality and universal happiness is that workers submit to changes in their daily habits and circumstances, then what need is there for them to organise or act for themselves? Owen's very faith in human malleability leads him to construct an image of the creation of utopia in which the working class is manipulated and reformed in order to ultimately increase its agency, but in which it never acquires *autonomy*, precisely because it never has to.

It is, furthermore, Owen's professed aim of universal happiness which justifies, in his vision, this implicit denial of autonomy. This is a kind of neutralisation – happiness can be made to mean something closer to contentment, which implies, among other things, a kind of blissful resignation to things as they are. If an indefinite sense of universal happiness is the only goal, then the methods by which that goal is brought about do not matter, so long as it *is* brought about in the end. Indeed, the very vagueness of the concept, as opposed to a more specific aim, means that it can be made to justify all kinds of paternalist meddling, because it does not necessarily make any claims to empower or liberate workers in any kind of tangibly defined sense. All that it promises is to change their suffering into bliss.

Perhaps the most well-known of Owen's practical schemes is that which is detailed in his "Report to the County of Lanark". Though he would go on in later works – especially in his own newspaper *The New Moral World* – to elaborate in greater detail the political and social arrangements which he conceived for these schemes, Owen's primary purpose in the "Report" was to illustrate precisely how society might be reorganised in a material, economic sense – on a small scale initially, but later throughout the world – in order that "productive employment might again be found for all who required it; and that the national distress,[65] of which all now so loudly complain, might be gradually converted into a much higher degree of prosperity than was attainable prior to the extraordinary accession lately made to the productive powers of society" (247). Typically, Owen begins with relatively humble, solidly material aims

[65] Owen was writing shortly after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, with its attendant economic crisis.

here, but by the time he has finished setting out his plans, he will have conceived of them as a sure route – indeed, the only route – by which his ideal new world will be brought into being. The basic economic and material arrangements set out in the "Report" would be the enduring model for Owen in all his attempts to imagine a way out of the old world and into the new.

This model consists of the establishment of communities of workers, consisting of between three hundred to two thousand people on six hundred to one thousand eight hundred acres (265). These workers would be "a whole population engaged in agriculture,[66] with manufactures as an appendage" (266). Importantly, the majority of agriculture in these communities would be conducted via spade cultivation, rather than with the plough. In Owen's theory, this would both increase the quality of produce and ensure ample – as well as genuinely *productive* – employment for all (254-259).[67] The land and capital necessary for the establishment of these communities would either be obtained from "landed proprietors or large capitalists" (285) or it would be given "by established companies having large funds to expend for benevolent and public objects; by parishes and counties, to relieve themselves from paupers and poor's rates; and by associations of the middle and working classes of farmers, mechanics, and tradesmen" (285). As I will go on to show, Owen later considered the possibility of groups of workers themselves investing the necessary capital and labour to found communities of cooperation – here, however, land and capital necessary would, in Owen's vision, be either given, raised collectively, or invested.

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[66] As Edward Royle points out in *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium*, there were, both before, during and after the time Owen was writing, numerous radical thinkers and movements with a predominantly agrarian focus, from the Diggers in the 17th century, to William Ogilvie and Thomas Spence in the 18th century, to the Chartists of the mid 19th (39-45). Though Owen neither explicitly acknowledges his predecessors, nor makes any allusion to them, it is important to recognise that he was very far from the only radical figure calling for a return to the land in his own time, and neither would he be the last.

[67] As Margaret Cole points out, Owen was not particularly concerned with the specifics of this idea – for Cole, Owen's keen focus on spade cultivation is "of the nature of a fad … Owen had clearly made no sort of scientific appraisement…" (136).

It was not only the mass provision of useful employment which Owen was aiming at – what he envisioned, in fact, was a more fundamental economic restructuring. In accordance with Ricardian economics (another unacknowledged influence, and one which even Owen himself may have been unaware of), Owen advocated a change in the standard of value, based on the idea that "manual labour, properly directed, is the source of all wealth, and of national prosperity" (246). In Owen's ideal communities, labour, which might be scientifically measured in the same way as, for example, horsepower (251), is to be the standard of value (250). This measure, in combination with steady employment and the automation of the production of non-agricultural goods (267), is to result in a proliferation of wealth amongst the workers of the Owenite community. This proliferation of wealth would itself have greater ramifications: because the standard of value is tied to labour, rather than to exchange value, the trading of goods is – so Owen imagines – always on equitable and cooperative terms, a system which "would render unnecessary and entirely useless the present demoralizing system of bargaining between individuals" (251). Individualism and competition – encouraged by the capitalist free market, the governing principle of which is "to produce or procure every article at the *lowest*, and to obtain for it, in exchange, the *highest* amount of labour" – would be dispensed with, in favour of "the genuine principle of barter", which is "the only equitable principle of exchange" (262). Making a great rhetorical leap from economic specifics to the creation of a new world – a leap which demonstrates the difficulty of distinguishing Owen's means from his ends – Owen declares that "as [the new economic system] would materially improve human nature, and raise all in the scale of well-being and happiness, none could be injured or oppressed" (251).

But, says Owen, "[b]efore this change can be carried into effect, various preparatory measures will be necessary" (263). The measures referred to here are supposed to address the more immediate facts of human existence, specifically housing and education. In place of slum housing, Owen imagines the workers of his communities living in "a large square, or rather

parallelogram", separated into apartments, across the middle of which would be arranged a place of worship, schools, a communal kitchen and a dining hall (268) in which all the inhabitants would "eat together as one family" (275). Each apartment would, importantly, be spacious, well-heated and well-ventilated, and would possess a view both out into the country beyond it and, on the other side, over the interior of the parallelogram of which it is a part (276). Though he does not state it explicitly, the fundamental goal of these housing measures is the propagation of a sense of community, or the development of a collective ethic beyond the atomised individual. Every citizen is housed in the same building, within view of every other citizen, each living in relative comfort but none distinguished by rank or wealth. Owen's educational plans are likewise oriented towards the inculcation of a thoroughly communal ethic: children are to be taught to exercise their faculties of reason independent of prejudice (in place of rote learning), to be fully instructed in all practical matters relating to the effective operation of their communities (283) and to be trained to spurn competition and avarice in favour of benevolence and fellow-feeling (287-288). The results of this will be the creation of "delightful companions and associates, intimately acquainted with each other's inmost thoughts". In the character of these new Owenites "[t]here will be no foundation for disguise or deceit of any kind", and indeed "[t]hey will have minds so well informed … that they must clearly perceive that to be raised to one of the privileged orders would be to themselves a serious evil, and to their posterity would certainly occasion an incalculable loss … equally injurious to themselves and to society" (287-288).

The combination of these elements – of readily available and amply compensated labour, of drastically increased production, of good quality communal housing, of the collective preparation and consumption of food and of an education designed to promote the clear exercise of reason and the creation of a collective, anti-individualist ethic – is to have profound consequences for humanity as a whole. Such a combination will, firstly,

change the very nature of its subjects, in the most fundamental terms. Owen declares:

> After a life spent in the investigation of the causes of the evils with which society is afflicted, and of the means of removing them, - and being now in possession of facts demonstrating the practicability and the efficacy of the arrangements now exhibited, which have been the fruit of that investigation, aided by a long course of actual experiments, - [I offer] to exchange [my fellow humans'] poverty for wealth, their ignorance for knowledge, their anger for kindness, their divisions for union. (296)

Owen – whose fundamental purpose is to put into practice "the science of the influence of circumstances over human nature" (272) – intends not only to improve the material and economic circumstances of working people, but to facilitate a transformation in their ethical and emotional lives: to "enable them to enjoy more happiness than is to be found among any other population of the same extent in any part of the world" (297).

Not only this, but this state of happiness – the achievement of which, as I have argued, is the central factor around which Owen's vision revolves – is supposed, in Owen's vision, to proliferate among the world entire, through the gradual but unstoppable universal adoption of his material reforms. Owen often professes a desire in his "Report to the County of Lanark" not only to help the unemployed and the poor – though these are his primary concerns to begin with – but, more broadly, his "fellow-creatures" (272). Owen writes:

> Extensive, - nay, rather, universal, - as the re-arrangement of society must be … It will necessarily commence by common consent, on account of its advantage, almost simultaneously among all civilized nations; and, once begun, will daily advance with an accelerating ratio, unopposed, and bearing down before it the existing systems of the world. (271)

This advance will be occasioned not by violent revolution, but by the simple recognition by all of the superiority of Owen's plans:

> as the character, conduct, and enjoyment of individuals formed under the new system will speedily become living examples of the vast superiority of the one state over the other, the natural death of old society and all that appertains to it although gradual, will not be lingering. Simple inspection, when both can be seen together, will

> produce motives sufficiently strong to carry the new arrangements as speedily into execution as practice will admit. (274)

The advance will be inexorable: "Circumstances far beyond the knowledge or control of those whose minds are confined within the narrow prejudices of class, sect, party, or country now render this change inevitable; silence will not retard its progress, and opposition will give increased celerity to its movements" (296).[68] Whereas, as will be seen, William Morris acknowledges the necessity of some degree of violence, or at least of some form of confrontation, in the transition from a capitalist society to a communist one, Owen imagines the gospel-like spread of his irrefutably beneficial plans across the globe, seamlessly supplanting the old system of economic individualism without so much as a shot being fired.

Thus, in the final instance, Owen imagines that the simple introduction of his material reforms will serve to speedily establish his desired state of universal happiness. His insistence, furthermore, on the inevitability of this conversion, as well as its almost instantaneous quality, implies that the role of the working class itself is essentially minimal, beyond its willing submission to his beneficent designs. The temporal gap which Owen imagines between manipulation of the minutiae of everyday life and the arrival of the communal paradise of his forecasting is so minimal that it does not need an empowered or liberated working class to bridge it, but only one which will leap according to Owen's directions. In any case, Owen's objective – which is nothing more or less than a universal assumption of the affective state of happiness – does not necessarily grant that personal or collective autonomy is even a desirable thing in the first place. Owen is here constructing a particular image of the working class in the creation of utopia; as will be seen, his unwillingness to accommodate the question of autonomy within this image is not only implicit – it is also, in other ways, pointedly explicit. It is, further, far more complex than a simple proscription. The latent power of the working class, as Owen

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[68] The final part of this quote – from "silence" to "movements" – is an exact repetition of a line which Owen uses in his earlier work *A New View of Society* (17).

perceives it, is certainly to be drawn out, but only so that it might be directed and marshalled.

Autocracy, Agency and Autonomy

The above measures, then, were the means by which Owen intended to achieve his ideal society. Owen, of course, viewed them as practically incontrovertible – anyone who opposed them was either wrong or dishonest. This attitude of Owen's – what his biographer Ian Donnachie has called "the increasingly superior manner of a philosopher reformer" – served not only to alienate him from some of his supporters, but to invite fervent criticism from his detractors. Economists like Robert Torrens objected to Owen's plans based on their departure from economic orthodoxy, whilst radical politicians like Henry Hunt and William Cobbett were dissatisfied partly because Owen made no mention of parliamentary reform or reduced taxation (Donnachie 139), and partly because they believed he wanted to "rear up a community of slaves" (qtd. in Donnachie 139). This last objection – which is one of many in a similar vein, including Cobbett's famous "parallelogram of paupers" remark – represents one of the most enduring criticisms of Owen's plans: that of a kind of autocratic paternalism. It was repeated by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in which they placed Owen in the category of "Critical-Utopian Socialism", along with the French socialists Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier (514).[69] Marx and Engels declare that "the proletariat, as yet in its infancy, offers to [the Critical-Utopian Socialists] the

[69] In spite of their similarities, as well as their contemporaneity, Owen makes no mention of Charles Fourier (1772-1837) throughout his work, except in his autobiography. Here, Owen claims (more than a little implausibly) that Fourier "obtained all his knowledge respecting the formation of a society limited in number to form a *practical* community" from Owen's *Report to the County of Lanark*, but that "not knowing the true foundation on which to base society, he made a confused medley of old and new notions, which can never be combined to work permanently together with harmony" (322). Of Saint-Simon, Owen makes no mention at all.

spectacle of a class without any historical initiative or any independent political movement". For these socialists,

> [h]istorical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones, and the gradual, spontaneous class organization of the proletariat to an organization of society specially contrived … Future history resolves itself, in their eyes, into the propaganda and the practical carrying out of their social plans.

The working class, the subject of these social plans, exists only, for the Critical-Utopian Socialists, "from the point of view of being the most suffering class" (515). In the view of Marx and Engels, the Critical-Utopian Socialists view the members of the working class as suffering but helpless children, who require direction, reorganisation and a paternal hand on their collective shoulder.

This kind of criticism of Owen, first made in the nineteenth century by his contemporaries and immediate successors, continues on into the critical and historical discussion of Owen in the twentieth century, especially amongst English socialist writers associated with such movements as Guild Socialism and, later, the New Left. For these critics and historians, the only role that Owen was capable of imagining for the working class in the creation of his new world was that of the shepherded flock. G. D. H. Cole wrote that Owen "[regarded] all men as children, to be saved, not by their own bemused kicking against the pricks, but by the action of some beneficent power that should change their environment for them" (*Life of Robert Owen* 316), and thought of himself as "the chosen instrument of their enlightenment, to whom they must surrender their will and judgment for their own good" (317). For Raymond Williams, Owen was "as firmly paternalist, and as essentially authoritarian, as a Tory reformer like [Robert] Southey" (*Culture and Society* 43), while E. P. Thompson wrote that "the notion of working-class advance, by its own self-activity towards its own goals, was alien to Owen", who was "cast as the kindly Papa of Socialism" (*Making* 859). In Ralph Miliband's account, meanwhile, "Owen, like his fellow Utopians with whom he shared so many other characteristics, inherited the belief of eighteenth-century thought in the benevolent despot as the agent of social change" (235). Though each of these

writers recognise, to one degree or another, something of value in Owen's thought and practical work, this central criticism is common to them all.

The charge brought against Owen of an inability to imagine the working class acting for itself, by itself and under its own direction is not an unfair one. As I will demonstrate below, there are many aspects of Owen's rhetoric, as well as his practical visions, which suggest an outright hostility towards workers organising and acting in an autonomous fashion, and there are even points at which Owen seems to deny the very possibility of such a thing. Nonetheless, as I will afterwards go on to show, in its generality this accusation misses an important dimension of Owen's image of the role of the working class in the creation of utopia. Owen does not imagine that the working class will simply be placed in a new material situation, herded about like cattle. He wants, in a sense, to empower the working class – to transform it into something beyond what it is. At the same time, however, Owen's image of an empowered working class building utopia is one in which its power is subject to discipline and control. In essence, Owen imagines this class functioning in the same way as an army. Instead of waging war, however, it is to be deployed in maximising its own productive and social capacities, and in doing so creating the utopia which, eventually, it is itself supposed to inhabit. It will be a work-force, in the most literal sense of the word.

In spite of this important point of nuance, it is not difficult to see why critics, both earlier and later, have accused Owen of adopting a straightforwardly autocratic stance towards the working class. Alongside the paternalistic reforming impulse which is implicit within his material plans for the creation of utopia, Owen effectively constructed an image of the nineteenth-century working class which saw its members dispossessed of any sense of real autonomy. Indeed, the picture of the actually existing working class which emerges in Owen's work is not one made up of reasoning human beings, but, as will be seen, thoughtless children or mindless automatons. Of course, Owen's picture of the working class which is to actually populate utopia – or the working class in its finished state, as Owen would have it – is very different.

The utopian worker would be thoroughly rational, utterly benevolent and hyper-productive. Indeed, this distinction represents something of a dichotomy within Owen's thought: the pre-utopian working class on the one hand, and the post-utopian on the other. Owen's image of the latter is almost angelic: a picture of serenity, wisdom, productivity and kindness, possessed, as will be seen, of a significantly greater degree of autonomy than its nineteenth-century ancestors (though this autonomy is still restricted in some senses). Owen's image of the former, on the other hand, is the exact opposite: shiftless, dishonest, impulsive, irrational, violent. In this way, Owen's image of the working class *as it existed*, rather than as he wanted it to exist – the 'raw material' out of which utopia would be made, and which would work to establish it – remained essentially negative, and worked to disavow the possibility of the collective autonomy of that class. The working class of the early nineteenth century would, for Owen, have to be transformed into what was essentially its own opposite before it could possess the ability to direct itself in any palpable sense.

Throughout his life, Owen expressed a desire not only to improve "the general condition of the population" but also to "[renovate its] moral character" (*Report to the County* 259) – to remake it in his own image, indoctrinating it in "temperance and simplicity of manners" (*Address to the Inhabitants* 113), rendering it not active and liberated but docile and contented. Indeed, Owen very often speaks of the working class as something to be acted upon, usually by his own hand. "I had ascertained", he writes in his biography, "how populations should be trained, educated, and occupied to *make* them good, intelligent, and happy" (emphasis added). For him, the working class is an object, distinct from himself, which, incapable of action on its own behalf, must be manipulated and controlled.

Sometimes, for Owen, the working class is not even human. Unlike William Morris, whose language regarding the working class and its political operation tends, as will be seen, towards the organic, Owen frequently conceives of the working class in starkly mechanical terms. Addressing industrialists and factory owners in *A New View of Society*, Owen says, "Many

of you have long experienced in your manufacturing operations the advantages of substantial, well-contrived, and well-executed machinery." Owen then asks, "If, then, due care as to the state of your inanimate machines can produce such beneficial results, what may not be expected if you devote equal attention to your vital machines, which are far more wonderfully constructed?" (these "vital machines" are, in Owen's mind, the working class). He continues:

> When you shall acquire a right knowledge of these, of their curious mechanism, of their self-adjusting powers; when the proper mainspring shall be applied to their varied movements … you will discover that the latter may be easily trained and directed to procure a large increase of pecuniary gain, while you may also derive from them high and substantial gratification. (8)

This is highly revealing because Owen, here at least, is constructing a certain image of the working class which renders workers themselves essentially inanimate, requiring only the hand of a clever engineer to maintain and improve them in order that they may carry on performing their functions efficiently.

Of course, the argument might be made that this machine metaphor is characteristic only of Owen's early work, and is discarded by the time he comes to take more seriously the question of the working class in works such as the *Report to the County of Lanark*, were it not for the fact that the image of the machine appears again in the latter text. Speaking of his plan for villages of cooperation – which, of course, are comprised explicitly and exclusively of *working people* – Owen declares that

> [a] machine it truly is, that will simplify and facilitate … all the operations of human life … If the invention of various machines has multiplied the power of labour …. THIS is an invention which will at once multiply the physical and mental powers of the whole society to an incalculable extent… (285-286)

Of course, Owen is here describing the mode of organisation which would exist within his cooperative villages, rather than the workers themselves, as he does in the earlier example. Nonetheless, his use of the image of the machine to characterise his community of workers suggests an attention to processes and

productive capacities, rather than to reasoning, feeling human beings.[70] So while it is not true to say that the figure of an unthinking automaton characterises the entirety of Owen's view of the working class, the fact that he was, on more than one occasion,[71] capable of deploying the machine metaphor suggests that his conception of working class autonomy was at best severely limited, sometimes to the point of active dehumanisation. A machine, after all, ultimately requires an operative.

As evidence in favour of the charge of autocratic paternalism, there is, finally, the fact of Owen's general opposition to working-class movements (with some qualifications, as I will demonstrate below) – that is, movements founded by, organised by and comprised mainly of the working class, the explicit aim of which was the liberation of that class on its own terms. As Owen imagined them, these movements were wrong-headed and essentially infantile, capable only of unthinking destruction. Though Owen professed this belief in almost everything he wrote, one particular essay entitled "To the Red Republicans, Communists, and Socialists of Europe", published as a preface to his book *The Revolution in the Mind and Practice of the Human Race; or the Coming Change from Irrationality to Rationality* (1849), illustrates it most fully. In this essay, Owen begins by recognising the genuine plight of the working class, which arises from real and existing material conditions: "Under … the present false and most injurious system of society, the enormous powers which it contains … are so misapplied as to produce … evils so grievous to the mass of mankind, as to be unbearable, and to force them by every means which they

[70] Ironically – and somewhat paradoxically – this declaration comes mere paragraphs after Owen prophesies an "end of all mere animal machines, who could only follow a plough, or turn a sod, or make some insignificant part of some insignificant manufacture or frivolous article" (*Report to the County of Lanark* 284) if his schemes are carried out.

[71] See also Owen's *The Life of Robert Owen*, in which he describes the community of New Lanark: "All the houses in the village, with one hundred and fifty acres of land around it, formed parts of the establishment, all united, and working together as one machine, proceeding day by day with the regularity of clockwork" (187).

can devise to endeavour to overcome them". Owen goes on to link this grievance to recent political events:

> It is this impulse … which now agitates the populations of Europe, and alarms the governing powers. This was the true cause of the French revolution in February last [the revolution of 1848], and of all the revolutions which have previously or since occurred over the world. Nor will these revolutions now cease until there shall be an entire change in the whole system of society, both in principle and practice.

Having acknowledged the legitimate causes of these movements, Owen begins to criticise them, essentially on the grounds that they are based on feeling rather than reason: "So far, neither party appears to understand the cause of the evils experienced, or the permanent remedy for them; and, in consequence, both are now involved in confusion, and in insane contests" (xviii). As will be seen, William Morris conceived of feeling, affect and emotion as vital elements in the overthrow of capitalism by the working class, but for Owen such things can only ever be impediments to meaningful political change. For Owen, the socialism of working-class movements is based on "irrational principle, spirit, and conduct". It is, essentially, the product of a collective mind – the working-class mind – unable or unwilling to engage in calm and reasoned thought, a diagnosis which proceeds from the fact that the working-class movements in question have been unwilling to immediately disband and submit themselves to Owen's benevolent ministrations. Moreover, these movements represent in Owen's view a kind of mirror image of the thing against which they are struggling: speaking to the working-class movements directly, he tells them that "[t]he principle on which you proceed is, that man is a free agent, and creates his own qualities, will, and conduct; and, naturally, you therefore blame and punish him, if his qualities, will, and conduct, are opposed to yours" (xx). Like a pleading parent interceding in a fight between two squabbling children, Owen continues: "See you not, my friends, that the contests in which you are now engaged, are contests of one false principle and evil spirit, against a similar false principle and evil spirit? While this error in your practice continues, one party or the other must be destroyed, and the victor will be left powerless for good" (xxi). Genuine

objections to political violence aside, the thrust of Owen's criticism here is that working-class movements, by engaging in struggle and conflict – whether violent or otherwise – explicitly for their own sake and to further their own interests, are essentially operating on the same terms as *laissez-faire* individualists. As far as Owen is concerned, as soon as the working class gains any kind of stake in society, it will – because, labouring unthinkingly under the prejudices imparted to it by circumstance, it is essentially selfish – proceed to inflict the same sufferings upon the vanquished order as its members had to endure themselves. This ignores, of course, any possibility that working-class movements might have genuinely transformative aims beyond the simple acquisition of power. Owen is simply not capable of imagining a working class which might be able to think beyond its own immediate grievances.

A qualification should be made here: it is true that Owen was not, in theory, opposed to the working class organising for itself. In a series of articles from his newspaper *The New Moral World*, collectively entitled "Various Modes by Which the Change from Moral Evil to Moral Good May be Effected" (1834), Owen outlines seven possible ways in which co-operative communities might be founded and run. Alongside plans for the straightforward introduction of these communities by existing governments, or their foundation by a union of the aristocracy and the industrialists, is Owen's fifth plan, which is:

> a general union of the operatives and peasants in each country to form assorted associations to produce, 1st, the necessaries; 2nd, the comforts, and, in due time, the beneficial luxuries, if there be any luxuries which are permanently beneficial. A small weekly sum, collected regularly from each member of an extended union, would be amply sufficient, under a wise direction, to supply all the preliminary capital…

Such an organisation is, however, still very much to be run on Owen's terms. Moreover, having advocated this limited form of working-class organisation, Owen collapses into cynicism:

> The chief difficulties in carrying this plan into execution will arise from the want of a sufficiently intelligent executive, in whom the [members of this union] can place full confidence, and of practical, honest men at the head of the various departments required to be formed to effect

> the object, and also of parties with whom the funds of the union could be at all times placed in perfect security. (18)

Owen cannot imagine the working class as it currently exists as anything other than incompetent, impractical and dishonest. Willing to grant it a small degree of theoretical autonomy in the achievement of the new world, he nonetheless balks at the idea of such autonomy on a more significant scale, and is in any case unconvinced of its practical effectiveness.

Thus far, then, it seems as though the accusation of autocracy might be a fair one. But to find Owen unequivocally guilty on this account – a judgement towards which many twentieth-century critics lean – would be to overlook the broader arc of his political vision, which, though it could certainly be paternalist and autocratic in an immediate sense, also at times tended towards the abolition of undue privilege and the realisation of a kind of true democracy (though not, as I will make clear, true working-class autonomy). Gregory Claeys has argued this point: in his view, the notion that Owen was, on the whole, a reactionary, closer to Tory paternalists than to radicals and democrats, is a "misinterpretation", which is "based … upon statements which were meant to refer only to the *introduction* of the co-operative system, not to its eventual mode of operation" ("Paternalism and Democracy" 206). For Claeys, "[Owen] was much more of a democrat in many of his plans and organisations than has been hitherto assumed" (63). While he was indeed critical of democracy, "he also felt that in superseding given democratic forms, such as elections, this was a positive advance upon democratic goals, not a retreat from them. Owen did intend to abolish 'politics', but in so doing it was precisely arbitrary and unwarranted power that he sought to replace" (64). The plans which Claeys refers to are those which Owen outlines as the ideal way in which a co-operative community would be governed. Grouped together, these plans essentially constitute a political model intended, as Claeys suggests, to "abolish 'politics'" – that is, to do away with parties, elections and reforms and institute a dependable system which is, above all, an expression of the unitary nature of the community. Importantly, while this model is

predicated on an essential unity of purpose and mutual affection, it nonetheless dispenses with any notion of absolute and total egalitarianism and is instead characterised by a hierarchy based on age and experience.

The model of politics referred to above is outlined most comprehensively by Owen in *The New Moral World*, in an article entitled "Hints for the Formation of an Association" (1834). At its head would be a governor, called "The Social Father of the New Moral World", who would be chosen by two councils (presumably elected, though Owen does not specify how) – the junior and senior councils – which would be distinguished from one another by the age of their members. These two councils would also appoint an executive body, consisting of their own members, which itself would require the final approval of the Social Father. The co-operative community as a whole, meanwhile, would consist of members, who, in order to gain admission, would first have to satisfy the junior committee "that they are ready to relinquish the practices of moral or social evil, and to adopt the practices of moral or social good", and would secondly have to "attend … Sunday lectures, weekly discussions, and social festivals, for three months". These members, once admitted, would pass through three classes. Class one would consist of new members, who would have to undergo six months' probation in order to be admitted to class two, by the unanimous consent of that class. The same process would then be undergone for admittance into class three, membership of which would be renewed every year by a ballot. Members of class three are of the utmost importance: "they become brothers and sisters of the rational or new moral world". They are, in effect, to act as the apostles of Owenism, or to "carry out into full practice all the principles of moral or social good" (27). Any law passed in this system must be approved by the social father, the executive and both councils unanimously, as well as the majority of ordinary members (28).

These measures – which still require throughout their execution an adherence to a plan which is essentially of Owen's making – may appear bizarre or convoluted. Nonetheless, they represent an attempt, even in the

apparently paternalistic *process* of the creation of the new world, to conceive of a political system which would, in Owen's view, facilitate a greater degree of actual self-government than an electoral system – an attempt to conceive of an interim political system in which, at least to some degree, the principles of government are based on mutual aid and on collective interest. And while Owen does imagine the introduction of a hierarchy, it is one based, at least in theory, on moral and ethical conviction, experience and popular consent, rather than coercion and monopoly. Finally, of course, as the ultimate purpose of Owen's third class makes clear, this entire system itself is, in the end, to give way to the new moral world, one in which every person has been remodelled and reshaped, made industrious, intelligent, happy, and, in both a material and a broader social sense, has been liberated (albeit with the somewhat arbitrary distinction between age groups remaining). No longer requiring government, the citizens of the new moral world will have reached that state of heavenly perfection which, as I have shown, was Owen's ultimate goal.

Of course, democratic though it may, in some respects, be, Owen does not seem to imagine this form of self-government actually facilitating working-class autonomy in any truly meaningful sense. The governors are to fairly and effectively administer the affairs of the community in a way which is genuinely directed by the desires of that community as a whole, but nowhere does Owen imagine them altering anything fundamental about its character, which is always and only, in his vision, to be Owenite. The notion that Owen was imagining a system more actually democratic – that is, more conducive to true working-class autonomy – than nineteenth-century electoral democracy is ultimately flawed, therefore, because the image he constructs of his hyper-democratic system is one in which the will of its constituents is exercised only within certain boundaries. Even as he appears to construct an alternative image of the working class, in which workers possess a degree of genuine autonomy, Owen cannot help but contain that autonomy within a restrictive structure of rigid and almost Byzantine rules – a structure which is, moreover,

strictly limited to those who are willing to go through a period of what is essentially indoctrination, and to prove their undying adherence to Owen's grand plan.

There is, then, a fundamental tension within Owen's radical vision between benevolent but firm autocracy and a genuine democratic impulse. On the one hand, he seems incapable of imagining an organised working class which might be able – by itself, on its own terms, autonomous – to effect any meaningful political change beyond the perpetuation of mindless struggle. On the other hand, he sincerely and earnestly attempts to integrate into the process by which his new moral world might be reached a system which is at least intended to embody and facilitate a democratic ethic – and thus, in a limited sense, working-class autonomy – beyond the limitations of nineteenth-century political convention.

The Militarism of Robert Owen

I will not, here, attempt to resolve the tension specified above – to argue that Owen was ultimately either a reactionary despot or a radical leveller only – but rather, finally, to highlight a particular *product* of that tension in Owen's vision which has so far gone unnoticed, which is Owen's tendency towards militarism. In this sense, Robert Owen's political imaginary is a *militarised* imaginary – the ways in which Owen imagines the working class acting to bring about his new moral world are often military in character, and rely on militaristic images and language, while the dimensions within which he grants agency to his imagined working class are, in very large part, of a military sort.

The image of Owen's militarised proletariat emerges first in the more mundane details of his plans. Though often compared to workhouses or prisons (Claeys, "Paternalism and Democracy" 161), the parallelograms in which Owen proposed to house the members of his co-operative communities might just as easily be compared to barracks. This did not escape Owen's contemporaries: T. J. Wooler, editor and publisher of the radical journal *The*

Black Dwarf, characterised Owen's parallelograms as "pauper barracks" (qtd. in Claeys, "Paternalism and Democracy" 161), and at a meeting in Dublin in 1823, one Reverend Dunne likewise publicly accused Owen of wanting to deprive workers of "their own cottages" and house them instead in "barracks" (qtd. in Harvey 91). The denunciation of the barrack-like nature of working-class housing would, of course, continue throughout the nineteenth century, for example in George Gissing's *The Nether World* (1889): "What terrible barracks, those Farringdon Road buildings! Vast, sheer walls, unbroken by even an attempt at ornament; row above row of windows in the mud-coloured surface" (3: 58). For Owen, however, workers' barracks were not a symptom of the disease but rather part of the cure. Whether or not Owen consciously intended to replicate a barracks in his imagined parallelogram – and there is no straightforward evidence that he did – his plan to concentrate the working inhabitants of his co-operative communities into one central building, arranged in a square, all eating together, speaks at least of a latent desire to discipline the working class in a spatial sense – to manipulate and order it into a rational shape, in order that it might be more effectively marshalled. This may not be overtly militaristic by itself, of course – the architecture of the workhouse and the prison served similar functions. But these were chiefly institutions of punishment, whereas, as far as can be ascertained, Owen did not intend to punish the inmates of his parallelograms, but rather to reshape and retrain them into a more efficient, more co-operative and ultimately more powerful unit – just as in a military barracks.

It should be acknowledged here that Owen was not the only proto-socialist figure of the early-to-mid nineteenth century to advocate such quasi-militarised dwelling places as a means of empowering and liberating the working class. Charles Fourier, Owen's contemporary, likewise advocated the idea of the *phalanstère*, a building somewhere between a barracks, a hotel and a palace, in which Fourierist ideals – chief among which was the alignment, through means of co-operation and education, of labour with pleasure and interest – would be embodied (Leopold 628-632). Fourier's name

for these communities comes partly from the Greek word *phalanx*, meaning a body of massed infantry, something which suggests a degree of latent Owen-esque militarism in its envisioning of Fourierist socialists as a kind of bold fighting unit, pressing ahead in the war of ideas.[72] Unlike Fourier, however, Owen's militaristic tendencies extended beyond the architectural and the spatial, encompassing a wider-ranging set of ideals and practices.

As well as military architecture, Owen also appeared to have an appetite for military discipline. As part of his proposed educational measures, Owen imagines the children of the working class being subject to military-style drilling. In his autobiography, Owen recalls that, as part of the measures which introduced at New Lanark, "[b]oth sexes were … drilled, and became efficient in the military exercises, being formed into divisions, led by young drummers and fifers, and they became very expert and perfect in these exercises" (195). As a result of this recollection he declares that, alongside music and dancing,[73] "the military discipline will always be [a] prominent [surrounding] in a rational system for the formation of character" (196). Strikingly, the introduction of military discipline into schools is to result in the formation of an *actual fighting force*. Because "exercises, adapted to improve the dispositions and increase the health and strength of the individual, will form part of the training and education of the children", these children "may be instructed to acquire facility in the execution of combined movements, a habit which is calculated to produce regularity and order in time of peace, as well as to aid defensive and offensive operations in war" (291). The children of the co-operative communities

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[72] William Morris would later mention Fourier in his own writing, remarking in 1888 that "his doctrine of the necessity and possibility of making labour attractive is one which Socialism can by no means do without" ("The Hopes of Civilization" 73). By the time he came to write *News from Nowhere*, however, Morris was inclined to look a little less favourably on Fourier's legacy. In that work, Morris has the character of Old Hammond declare that "the Fourierist phalangsteries and all their kind … implied nothing but a refuge from mere destitution" (65).

[73] For a comprehensive overview of the importance of music at Owen's New Lanark, see Lorna Davidson's article "A Quest for Harmony: The Role of Music in Robert Owen's New Lanark Community".

> therefore, at an early age, will acquire, through their amusements, those habits which will render them capable of becoming, in a short time, at any future period of life, the best defenders of their country, if necessity should again arise to defend it; since they would, in all probability, be far more to be depended upon than those whose physical, intellectual, and moral training had been less carefully conducted. (291-292)

It should be emphasised that Owen was a declared and committed pacifist. As Owen saw it, "the knowledge of the science of influence of circumstances over mankind will speedily enable all nations to discover, not only the evils of war, but the folly of it" (292). As his *Address to the Red Republicans* makes clear, Owen did not in any sense envisage actual violence as a method by which his ideal world could be achieved (xix). Indeed, Owen was actively disdainful of the institution of the military, declaring that it was "directed by the governments of the world to keep the great mass of its population in poverty, disunited, criminal, degraded, irrational and miserable" (*The Book of the New Moral World* 17). Owen's desire to create a miniature army, albeit one which would eventually be rendered superfluous, appears, then, strangely paradoxical. It makes more sense, however, if viewed alongside the other overtly militaristic aspects of Owen's plans. He did not imagine the working class of his co-operative communities engaging in actual conflict – Owen was neither a Cromwell nor a Napoleon[74] – but rather as a harmoniously integrated social unit which would, hypothetically, be capable of performing the function of an armed defence force. It would possess this capability not because that would be its ultimate purpose (though it might, in exceptional circumstances, be called upon to exercise that capability) but because the mode of its

[74] Owen sent a copy of *A New View of Society* to Napoleon during the latter's exile on the island of Elba. In his autobiography, Owen claims not only that Napoleon read his *New View*, in which "the erroneous warlike proceedings of Napoleon were animadverted upon", but also that it "so far changed his views, that he said, should he be allowed by the other European Powers to remain quiet on the throne of France, he would do as much for peace as he had previously done in war". There exists no evidence for this claim outside Owen's recollection, however, and whether Owen was simply lying or whether his source – one Major-General Sir Neil Campbell, who had supposedly had contact with Napoleon on the matter – was just telling him what he wanted to hear is unclear (279).

organisation – a militaristic mode, in which the individual is subsumed into the larger social unit and is capable of acting in seamless harmony with the rest of that unit – would significantly multiply its power and efficiency in a broader sense. Essentially, Owen was imagining not a working-class military but a militarised working class.

The militarised working class of Owen's political imaginary is not, of course, present in these overtly militaristic characteristics alone. It is also in his grander statements and broader visions that Owen exhibits militaristic tendencies, on the level of rhetoric and imagery. A particular clue here lies in the frequency of a particular word in Owen's writing, which appears countless times throughout his work (one hundred and fourteen times in *A New View of Society* alone). That word is "trained": in his autobiography, Owen recalls that, at New Lanark, he was "continually occupied in training the people" (112); later, he professes a desire to "train man to become a rational being" (146), while at another point he boasts that he has "ascertained to a great extent practically how populations should be trained … to make them good, intelligent, and happy" (180). In his "Address to the Inhabitants of New Lanark", Owen declares that "the time is come, when the means may be prepared to train all the nations of the world … not only to love but to be actively kind to each other in the whole of their conduct, without a single exception" (97), later adding that "every individual may be trained to produce far more than he can consume, while there is a sufficiency of soil left for him to cultivate" (110). In *A New View of Society*, Owen proposes his plan for "a reform in the training and in the management of the poor" (36), professing a desire to "train them into industrious, intelligent, and valuable members of the community" (86). In his "Report to the County of Lanark", finally, Owen asserts that his plans will show "how … easily men may be trained … to become, without exception, active, kind and intelligent" (272). The specificity of this word is important because it implies a certain relationship between Owen (or Owen's representatives) and the working class as he imagines them. Training, of course, has multiple meanings beyond militarism – animals are trained, as are apprentices. What

is common to all these senses of the word is that they all imply, firstly, subjection to something – either to an authority which will undertake the training or to a prescribed regimen. Secondly, they imply a remaking, or a forced transformation, possibly in the face of resistance by the trainee. This remaking is, in Owen's conception, both moral and physical – the working class can be trained both to become "good, intelligent, and happy" and to maximise the efficiency of their labour. Together, these implications suggest that Owen's plan for the achievement of his new world involves, at least in part, the intensive moulding and reworking of the working class into a specific shape, or, more specifically, into a specific social structure.

Though the rhetoric of training in this manner is not restricted to a military context, its significance for Owen's militaristic imaginary becomes clear when viewed alongside Owen's image of its outcome. For Owen, the purpose of the training which the working class must be put through is the re-making of that class into a militaristic organisation capable, through its strict organisation, of great feats of labour and production. It is possible to see this in a general sense – Owen imagines the working class moving, regiment-like, as a single, frictionless unit, each individual thinking ultimately of the benefit of the whole. It is an organisation subject to discipline at every level and every stage of life, efficient in labour and unrivalled in physical capacity. A particular passage in Owen's *Report to the County of Lanark* turns this implication into a specific goal:

> Men have not yet been trained in principles that will permit them to act in union, except to defend themselves or to destroy others. For self-preservation they were early compelled to unite for these purposes in war. A necessity, however, equally powerful, will now compel men to be trained to act together to create and conserve, that, in like manner, they may preserve life in peace … [T]he science of the influence of circumstances, which is the most important of all the sciences, remains unknown for the great practical business of life. When it shall be fully developed it will be discovered that to unite the mental faculties of men for the attainment of pacific and civil objects will be a far more easy task than it has been to combine their physical powers to carry on extensive war-like preparations. (270)

Historian Chushichi Tsuziki has touched on this aspect of Owen's plans, observing that "[Owen's] Association of All Classes of All Nations,[75] which embodied the first organised socialist movement in England, was not a miniature classless society, but an elite army" (34). But the notion of the army of labour is more central to Owen's political vision than this momentary observation allows. Essentially, Owen acknowledges that the training of people to "act in union" – one of the fundamental principles of his entire plan – has hitherto been mainly the preserve of the military. Owen does not intend to abolish this principle, but rather to appropriate and adapt it. He constructs an image of a working class trained and organised in the manner of an army but working towards ends other than war. These ends, it must not be forgotten, are the liberation of the working class from what Owen sees as useless toil, squalor, ignorance and oppression, and, ultimately, the empowerment of the working class not only to govern itself but to live and work entirely for itself. But before that point can be reached – indeed, as a fundamental part of its attainment – it is necessary, in Owen's vision, to organise the working class into what is quite explicitly an army of labour.

The tone in which Owen speaks of the militaristic process by which his new world is to be achieved can sometimes take on a more bizarre aspect, especially in his more messianic moments. I have said that Owen was no Cromwell, and indeed he wasn't, but there are nonetheless points where he appears to imagine himself as a kind of holy warrior or great general, engaged in battle at the head of a crusading force. In his autobiography, he recalls realising that "all ultimately … must become united, good, wise, wealthy, and happy … And my decision was made to overcome all opposition and to succeed, or to die in the attempt" (181). In *A New View*, this combative tone can be seen heightened into a feverish battle-cry: condemning the principle of *laissez-faire* individualism, he commands his readers to "destroy this hydra of

[75] The Association of All Classes of All Nations was a society, founded by Owen in May 1835, designed to propagate his communitarian plans. By the 1840s it had 60 branches with as many as 50,000 members (Donnachie 260-261).

human calamity, this immolator of every principle of rationality, this monster, which hitherto has effectually guarded every avenue that can lead to true benevolence and active kindness." "This enemy of humanity may now be most easily destroyed", he continues, "[l]et it be dragged forth from beneath the dark mysterious veil by which till now it has been hid from the eyes of the world" (65). While it would be a mistake to assume that Owen was always operating in this furious register, utterances like these are nonetheless demonstrative of a latent desire to engage, albeit imaginatively, in a form of destructive conflict with the world as it is, wielding the working class as a weapon.

It is important to once again acknowledge here that Owen did not imagine this militarised working class as a permanent organisation. In Owen's vision of utopia achieved, this army seems almost to disappear into the ether, giving way to the Edenic realm of his prophesy in which, as I have shown earlier, all will become "kind, just consistent, and rational" (*Manifesto* 9). No more is said, in Owen's new world, of this labouring army. Nonetheless, Owen's image of the working class *as it exists for him*, and as it is engaged in the construction of utopia, is quite distinct from his image of the serene and perfect being of his promised utopia. The image of this class – of the actually-existing working class, as opposed to the working class of his utopian projection – is one of control, discipline, regimentation and subjection.

It is too simplistic, then, simply to say that Owen imagined the working class as something to be either controlled, reformed or abolished in the creation of his new world. In one sense, he did view the working class – or at least, the working class as it existed in the early nineteenth century – as essentially incapable of thoughtful action without guidance, at times an unthinking brute, at others a lifeless machine. In this sense, the charge of paternalism brought against Owen seems irrefutable – it is only too evident that the mass of the nineteenth-century working class as it existed in Owen's political imaginary was shiftless, deceitful, ignorant and inert. At the same time, Owen did not see such characteristics as *inherent* to members of the working class. For him, they were the products of circumstance – of education, material

surroundings, government and labour. In spite of his often-misanthropic view of working people, Owen could imagine a working class governing itself, organising itself and essentially living and working for itself, even *during* the journey from the old world to the new. All the workers had to do was follow Owen's orders and they, too, could be liberated as a class, becoming able, as a collective social unit, to work for nothing other than their own – and the world's – collective happiness.

For Owen, the tension between these two apparently opposed notions – between the immediate picture of the worker as hopeless object of suffering and the anticipated image of the worker as empowered and happy – was irreconcilable. This unresolved tension had a significant impact on his construction of the figure of the working class: he imagined it as simultaneously liberated and controlled; on the one hand freed from its ignorance, its hardship and its oppression, and on the other marshalled into organised units, trained and disciplined into a conformity which Owen mistook for freedom. He conceived of a working class granted hitherto impossible strength, one whose labour, material circumstances, social relations and ethical life were all conducive towards almost infinite productivity and happiness, as well as the eventual reality of self-government and absolute equality. At the same time, he was unable to imagine the acquisition of that happiness and freedom by any means other than subjection to militaristic discipline, a discipline which operated in every sphere, from the specifics of domestic life to fundamental ethical principles.

As will be seen in the following section, William Morris had his own vision of a militarised working class working in unison to effect revolutionary political change, though the nature and dimensions of Morris's own militaristic vision are markedly different from Owen's. For Morris, an affective state of soldierly bravery and fortitude, present within each member of the working class, would be the engine of its collective power. Owen's militaristic vision of the working class was different: he did not, as E. P. Thompson suggested,

want the working class "abolished" (*Making* 864) – he wanted to send it to boot camp.

Section II: William Morris, Violence and the Revolutionary State of Being

William Morris, like Robert Owen, was a figure particularly vulnerable to accusations of hypocrisy. Like Owen, Morris was simultaneously a critic of capitalism and a successful capitalist, who amassed a considerable sum of wealth over the course of his life,[76] Though he treated the employees of Morris & Co. (previously Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.) and the Kelmscott Press somewhat better than they might have been treated elsewhere, he was nonetheless quite unambiguously an employer,[77] His critics, predictably, never tired of pointing this out (Vaninskaya, *The Idea of Community* 46). In spite of the similarity of their positions within capitalist society, however – not only wealthy employers but, in their respective radical or socialist phases, financiers to the movements of which they were a part – Morris and Owen did not share the same vision of the ideal world to come. Whereas Owen constructed a quasi-Edenic image of a society characterised by harmonious relations and hyper-productive co-operative endeavour, Morris looked to a future which he referred to rather more specifically as distinctly communist.[78] There were,

[76] Of course, much of Morris's wealth was inherited – he had been born heir to the Devonshire Great Consolidated Copper Mining Co., a venture which had made his father and uncle very wealthy indeed (MacCarthy 22).

[77] At one point, as Anna Vaninskaya notes, Morris came alarmingly close to engaging in industrial conflict on what he would have doubtless regarded as the wrong side: a particularly stiff new ink had been introduced at the Kelmscott Press, and the (unionised) staff came close to striking over it, with Morris threatening to shut down production (*The Idea of Community* 46).

[78] Morris specifically saw himself as a communist, as opposed to a mere socialist, declaring that "Communism is in fact the completion of Socialism: when that ceases to be militant and becomes triumphant, it will be Communism." Communism, for Morris, meant "that the resources of nature, mainly the land and those other things which can only be used for the reproduction of wealth … should … be owned … by the whole community for the benefit of the whole" ("Communism" 271). This was in opposition to any notions of amelioration or redistribution within the existing class structure.

certainly, a few similarities between the two: as I have argued previously, Morris's communist future is centred around a universal affective state, which is the state of pleasure. In a similar way, Owen's future is based around a universal state of happiness. Morris, moreover, ultimately envisions the fostering of a communal ethic whereby each person would identify their own interest with the interests of their society as a whole,[79] while at the same time keeping in mind the ineradicable fact of individual difference and emphasising the importance of individual development ("True and False Society" 233-235). Owen, as I have argued in the preceding section, imagines something very similar in his new moral world. Nonetheless, Morris's vision of the future is distinctly his own. Firstly, Morris's epoch of pleasure would, as I have argued previously, be produced by the ability of each individual to expend their labour in a useful, dignified and generative way. Secondly, it would have certain organisational characteristics: it would be essentially decentralised, existing as a "Federation of Independent Communities", rather than a single universal organism.[80] Thirdly, Morris's vision gestured towards the implementation of a specific economic programme, which was the elimination of "waste" by a scaling-down of markets – essentially a curbing of consumption in order to better apply labour power where it is really needed "(How We Live" 19). Finally, a communist society, as Morris imagines it, would *itself*, through the course of its existence, go through distinct stages of development. This would begin with the establishment of "state socialism", in which the state "will be the sole possessor of the national plant and stock, the sole employer of labour, which

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[79] See, for example, *News from Nowhere*, in which an inhabitant of Morris's utopia declares that "a tradition or habit of life has been growing on us; and that habit has become a habit of acting on the whole for the best. It is easy for us to live without robbing each other. It would be possible for us to contend with and rob each other, but it would be harder for us than refraining from strife and robbery" (112).

[80] Kristin Ross, in her book on the political imaginary of the Paris Commune, points out that a "vision of social transformation predicated on a large voluntary federation of free associations existing at the local level" is what "unites and cross-pollinates thinkers like Morris, Marx, Reclus, Kropotkin", many of whom, so Ross argues, were working from the example set by the actions and ideas of the Communards themselves (111).

she will so regulate in the general interest", and end, eventually, with a true communist society, which is "a federation of communities who would hold all wealth in common, and would use that wealth for satisfying the needs of each member" ("True and False Society" 235).

Not only were Morris's and Owen's visions of the future ultimately different – their attitudes towards the creation of those futures were divergent too, especially regarding the notion of class struggle and the issues of confrontation and conflict. Morris, for his part, was caught up in one of the most important debates within late nineteenth-century socialism. That debate was between the advocates of reform and of revolution, the central question of which Colin Skelly summarises in the following way: "would there be a crisis of capitalism, an insurrection or would social evolution simply ease society to a higher stage?" (39). In this debate, Morris was firmly in the revolutionary camp, and therefore on the side more reconciled to the necessity for confrontation, especially during the early years of his socialist activity, when he believed that such a revolutionary confrontation was only "a year or two of growing hope" away ("Feudal England" 58). Though in his later years he became a good deal less optimistic about the imminence of the arrival of this confrontation – in 1893, for example he declared that "the time is not now for the sudden kindling of the impulse of direct aggression amongst the mass of the workmen" ("Communism" 269), emphasising instead the task of "instilling into the minds of the people a knowledge of the aims of Socialism, and a longing to bring about the … change" (270) – Morris never abandoned this revolutionary position. The purpose of the educational emphasis outlined above, for example, was ultimately to allow workers to "find themselves in such a position that they understand themselves to be face to face with false society" (269), or to encourage them to recognise that their interests and the interests of capitalism are thoroughly and ultimately opposed. Though this might be a deferral of revolutionary action, it does not constitute a rejection – the aim was still to "make war upon the monopolist" (276). Nor did Morris's cautious endorsement of parliamentarianism during his later socialist years –

following implacable opposition to it during the 1880s ("Whigs, Democrats, and Socialists" 31-34) – entail any sort of abandonment of the revolutionary position. Though Morris's daughter May quotes him as saying "I cannot fail to see that it is necessary somehow to get hold of the machine which has at its back the executive power of the country" ("Socialism Comes Into Politics" 350), nonetheless, parliamentary action was useful in Morris's view *only* insofar as it encouraged workers to organise, to "claim more and yet more of the wealth produced by society" and to "give form to vague aspirations which are in the air about them" ("Communism" 269-270). Parliamentarianism was not anathema to Morris the mature socialist as it was to Morris the recent convert, but it was only useful insofar as it tended towards the cultivation of a working-class movement, the final aim of which remained a revolutionary confrontation with the ruling class and the subsequent realisation of communism.

For Morris, Owen simply failed to acknowledge the need for such revolutionary confrontation, which was ultimately necessary due to the potent power which a superior class would always attempt to wield over an inferior one:

> The Socialism of Robert Owen fell short of its object because it did not understand that, as long as there is a privileged class in possession of the executive power, they will take good care that their economical position, which enables them to live on the unpaid labour of the people, is not tampered with ("The Hopes of Civilization" 71).

In this way, Owen's and Morris's images of the working class diverge distinctly, and it is almost tempting to conclude the analysis there – to argue the somewhat obvious point that where Owen was well-intentioned but hopelessly naïve in his image of a frictionless transition from the old world to the new, Morris was a declared revolutionary who believed that power would only yield to greater power, and that therefore the two have little in common on this point. This argument contains an important element of truth, of course, but a careful comparison of Owen and Morris reveals greater similarities than immediate appearances might suggest.

As I have argued, Owen viewed the working class of his time as essentially incapable of organising its own liberation. It was at times a brute, at times a machine, but ultimately in constant need of direction and control in order that it might eventually be freed from its own helplessness. In seeking to provide this direction, Owen embraced the image of a militarised working class, not actually engaged in conflict but living, working and existing in the manner of an armed force, ready to be marshalled, deployed and disciplined. As I will go on to show, Morris's image of a revolutionary working class was in many senses the polar opposite of Owen's regimented labour force – it had no single presiding force or personality, and comprised instead a self-directed, communal, multi-centred group, possessed of both agency and autonomy. In spite of such differences, however, it is nonetheless the case that both Owen and Morris constructed an image of the working class which was in some sense militarised – which was to take on, though in importantly different ways, certain aspects of a fighting force. For Owen, it was the organisation of the working class collectively which was to be of a military character, whereas for Morris it was a question of individual self-discipline – in terms of both action and affect (and especially the latter) – revolving around the central notions of confrontation and struggle.

As will be seen, this emphasis on confrontation and struggle has led critics such as Ingrid Hanson to accuse Morris of a naked enthusiasm for revolutionary violence as the sole means by which a true communist society might be brought about. This accusation has some basis in evidence, but, importantly, fails to take into account Morris's much broader conception of revolutionary struggle. Actual acts of violent struggle were, of course, anathema to Owen, even as he imagined workers performing daily military drills, whereas for Morris, as will be seen, the question of the role of violence is more complex.[81] Indeed, as Anna Vaninskaya has pointed out in an editorial

[81] As Florence S. Boos has noted, Morris's first engagement with politics, via the 'Eastern Question', was in the context of a "'liberationist' anti-war movement" ("Dystopian Violence" 12). Boos argues that the pacifist emphasis of this early

for *The Journal of William Morris Studies*, "it is difficult to reconcile [Morris's] 'pacifism' and professed abhorrence of acts of violence with his narrative love of a good fight in the right cause" ("Editorial" 3). As I will demonstrate, the notions of violence and of a "good fight" were two very different things for Morris: actual violence was sometimes a simple necessity, and very occasionally a positively thrilling prospect, whereas fighting – or, rather, struggle, in a far broader sense than mere physical confrontation – had an absolutely vital role to play in the eventual triumph of the working class and the building of a communist society.

The Question of Violence

Robert Owen, as I have shown, regarded capitalist society as a Hobbesian war of all against all. In a similar way, Morris regarded capitalism as generative of a mutually destructive individualism: "the workers [have] to compete with each other … for livelihood; and it is this constant competition or war amongst them which enables the profit-grinders to make their profits" ("How We Live" 11). This war between individuals is, for Morris, reflected at a higher level, first in the competition between firms or companies (10), and secondly in the competition between rival nations (6). In Morris's conception, however, these capitalist wars of competition exist alongside and within a greater conflict, considerably larger in scale, which is the war of class against class. Owen, of course, was absolutely opposed to any notion of class conflict – his was a vision of unification or amalgamation of separate but not necessarily warring classes. For Morris, the picture was different. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, Morris, with Marx, presents history as a continuous struggle between classes. Importantly, Morris perceives this process as a form of war – sometimes hidden, sometimes open, but always spoken of in terms of conflict or aggression. It is, moreover, the aggression of the ruling class *in*

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experience represented, to varying degrees at various points throughout his life, a significant influence on Morris's political thought (39).

particular on which Morris fixates: for him, the oppressed class engages in conflict only as a reaction against violent pressure from above. This ruling-class aggression extends at least as far back as the Peasant's Revolt of 1381: in *A Dream of John Ball*, Morris's reimagining of the events of the Revolt, his narrator ventriloquises "the poll-groat bailiffs and the lords", who intend to respond to the growing power of the villeins and guilds with acts of violent oppression: "'Good it were if we fell on all who are not guildsmen or men of free land, if we fell on soccage tenants and others, and brought both the law and the strong hand on them … So let us get the collar on their necks again…'" (222). This war of class against class continues on into nineteenth-century capitalism:

> the employing class is forced to make the most of its … possession of the means for the exercise of labour, and whatever it gets to itself can only be got at the expense of the working-class; and that class in its turn can only raise its standard of livelihood at the expense of the possessing class; it is *forced* to yield as little tribute to it as it can help; there is therefore constant war always going on between these two classes, whether they are conscious of it or not. ("Dawn of a New Epoch" 131)

Morris uses such terms as "war" ("How We Live" 12), "strife" ("Useful Work" 119) and "quarrel" ("Dawn of a New Epoch" 122) – terms which denote conflict specifically, rather than mere opposition – throughout his political work to describe the nature of class relations in nineteenth-century capitalism. Even in his final years, he still conceived of capitalism as "the war of classes" ("Communism" 265).

In response to this perpetual conflict, Morris, in his earlier socialist years especially, fixated on an image of a revolutionary process in which an organised working class would transform the struggle between classes into open war – to make plain and tangible what had hitherto been, though violent and destructive, ultimately hidden and concealed. Against fellow socialists such as Hyndman, who believed that the confrontation of the bourgeoisie with an actual tangible threat could then be used to "defuse the class war", Morris thought that "faced with the looming threat of socialism, the middle class were

more likely to trigger revolution by fighting to maintain their privileges" (Kinna, *The Art of Socialism* 161). "Nothing but a tremendous force can deal with this force [the force of capitalism]", Morris declared in 1886, "it will not suffer itself to be dismembered, nor to lose anything which really is its essence without putting forth all its force in resistance; rather than lose anything which it considers of importance, it will pull the roof of the world down upon its head" ("Whigs, Democrats and Socialists" 33). As a result, the working class would have no choice but to engage in violent struggle of their own, and though violence would by no means be a cause for celebration itself – "cruel he was to make them cruel" remarks the narrator of *A Dream of John Ball*, of a lawyer hanged by the rebel peasants (252) – yet this final bloody crescendo of the centuries-old process of class struggle would mark that struggle's final hours:

> It may be that the best we can hope to see is that struggle getting sharper and bitterer day by day, until it breaks out openly at last into the slaughter of men by actual warfare instead of by the slower and crueller methods of "peaceful" commerce. If we live to see that, we shall live to see much; for it will mean the rich classes grown conscious of their own wrong and robbery, and consciously defending them by open violence; and then the end will be drawing near. ("Useful Work" 119).

It is worth pointing out here that Morris was by no means wholly enthusiastic about this prospect – as Phillipa Bennett has pointed out, Morris was "prevented by his own temperament and values[82] from asserting a claim for violence as a necessary stage on the path to greater social good, [but] he always believed that it would to some extent be inevitable when the revolution arrived at its final stage" ("Riot, Romance and Revolution" 30).

Morris is certainly not entirely reluctant to portray actual acts of revolutionary violence in his major works of socialist literature: in *News from Nowhere*, especially the chapter entitled "How The Change Came", in which

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[82] Though sometimes enthusiastic about the prospect of revolutionary conflict, Morris maintained an abhorrence for acts of violence on an individual, tangible level. Fiona MacCarthy notes that "[i]ndiscriminate anarchic violence always repelled Morris. It was socialism distorted" (545), an observation borne out by Morris's remark, that "'the idea of taking any human life for any reason whatsoever is horrible and abhorrent to me'" (qtd. in "Socialism Comes Into Politics" 350).

Old Hammond recounts the events which led up to the establishment of the communist utopia of Nowhere, incidents or periods of violence appear as moments of triumph which provide the genesis for greater transformation: "'A huge crowd assembled in Trafalgar Square … there was a good deal of dry-blow fighting; three or four of the people were killed, and half a score of policemen were crushed to death in the throng … This was a victory for the people as far as it went'" (111). The authorities react to this violent episode with greater violence of their own (115-117), which in turn spurs the workers on "'to the eager, restless heroism of a declared revolutionary period'" (128). The result of the advent of this period is a "'fighting-time'", in which "'all was hope: 'the rebels' at last felt themselves strong enough to build up the world again from its dry bones, – and they did it, too!'" (131). In this instance, the image of violence enacted by the revolutionary working class is a generative one, which acts as a catalyst for a transitional period of further violent conflict, out of which the remaking of the world emerges.

The violence in *News from Nowhere* is, of course, described in a prosaic, rather matter-of-fact fashion, almost in the style of a newspaper report. In the earlier political works, however – such as *A Dream of John Ball*, as well as Morris's poem *The Pilgrims of Hope*, which concerns an ill-fated working-class couple who become caught up in the events of the Paris Commune[83] – revolutionary violence is sometimes rendered in romanticised terms. There are, in these works, occasional images of revolutionary workers (or, in the case of *A Dream of John Ball*, rebellious peasants, who are a kind of proto-working class) engaged in acts of glorified or heroic violence. In *John Ball*, for example, Morris lingers over the image of the character Will Green, one of the peasant rebels, preparing his longbow for battle:

> Will Green set hand and foot to the great shapely piece of polished red yew, with its shining horn tips … and bent it with no seeming effort; then he … drew out a long arrow, smooth, white, beautifully

[83] For more detail on Morris's considerable and longstanding interest in the Paris Commune, see "'The Valiant Dead': William Morris and the Paris Commune of 1871" by J. B. Wright.

> balanced, with a barbed iron head at one end, a horn nock and three strong goose feathers at the other. He held it loosely between the finger and thumb of his right hand, and there he stood with a thoughtful look on his face, and in his hands one of the most terrible weapons which a strong man has ever carried, the English long-bow and cloth-yard shaft. (239)

The loving attention with which Morris renders what is essentially a piece of weaponry – detailing in somewhat awed tones the finer points of its colour, shape and texture, as well as its operation by Will Green – suggests a willingness to aestheticise violence, or at least to view with a certain uncritical longing the trappings of violence. Shortly after this scene the battle begins, much of which is rendered without too many flights of poetic fancy, but which occasionally erupts into the language of romance. For example, in the following passage the narrator describes the loosing of a volley of arrows in tones of stunned admiration: “A moment, as [Will Green] took his aim, and then – O then did I understand the meaning of the awe with which the ancient poet speaks of the loose of the god Apollo’s bow” (249). The beginning of the sentence engenders a sense of heightened tension, which is then cut through abruptly – with the rhetorical flourish of “then – O then” – by an awestruck depiction of the fearful prowess in battle of Will Green, who is compared to an Olympian deity. Later, the men-at-arms enter the fray, “their arms clashing about them and the twang of the bows and whistle of the [rebels’] arrows never failing all the while, but going on like the push of the westerly gale” (251). The noise of the rebels’ weapons becomes a chorus, blending into one sustained sound, as though their individual efforts in battle add up to some greater force aligned not just with the rebel cause but with nature itself. Shortly afterwards again, the battle reaches its crescendo:

> lo, on a sudden a flight of arrows from our right on the flank of the sergeants' array, which stayed them somewhat; not because it slew many men, but because they began to bethink them that their foes were many and all around them; then the road-hedge on the right seemed alive with armed men, for whatever could hold sword or staff amongst us was there; every bowman also leapt our orchard-hedge sword or axe in hand, and with a great shout, billmen, archers, and all, ran in on them; half-armed, yea, and half-naked some of them; strong

> and stout and lithe and light withal, the wrath of battle and the hope of better times lifting up their hearts till nothing could withstand them. (251-252)

Morris's prose rushes on eagerly like the rebels it describes, punctuated by the enthusiastic interjection "yea" and a flurry of alliteration. The single sentence runs on quite relentlessly, giving the scene an urgent, almost breathless quality and engendering a distinct sense of excitement and exhilaration.

All the vivid, heightened battle scenes above, of swift archers and stout billmen – who, it must be remembered, are engaged in an early form of class struggle – as well as ancient mythological deities, inexorable natural forces and acts of reckless bravery, indicate a willingness on Morris's part to embrace violence not only as a necessary part of the revolutionary process, but occasionally as a *thrilling* part of it. In the scene above, it is "the wrath of battle *and* the hope of better times" (emphasis added) which lifts the hearts of the rebels – in this particular case, violence is something which is not only a grim task to be soberly carried out for the sake of the class struggle, but can come to seem like a dignified and ennobling act.

It is in *The Pilgrims of Hope*, however, in which a scene of romanticised armed struggle and the process of revolution appear to be most closely entangled. In this particular scene, the poem's first narrator, Richard, encounters a military parade, and is whisked off into a vision of the future revolution: "Far and far was I borne, away o'er the years to come, / And again was the ordered march, and the thunder of the drum, / And the bickering points of steel, and the horses shifting about / 'Neath the flashing swords of the captains--then the silence after the shout" (376). Against the violence of the ruling class, Richard imagines an army of the people engaged in a battle which will remake the world: "Hope in the simple folk, hope in the hearts of the wise, / For the happy life to follow, or death and the ending of lies, / Hope is awake in the faces angerless now no more, / Till the new peace dawn on the world, the fruit of the people's war" (376). This is quite explicitly to be a violent struggle – there are weapons, there is the prospect of death, both of which are features of what is to be specifically a "people's war". The very form of this scene,

moreover, lends it a restless energy – the meter of each verse is complex but relentless in its persistence, and the simple rhyme scheme of couplet after couplet again gives it a sense of exciting and inexorable momentum. Finally, this struggle is once again *generative* – it is to give fruition to a happy life of peace and truth.

It may be such incidences of thrilling or even glorified revolutionary violence which have led Ingrid Hanson, in her book *William Morris and the Uses of Violence*, to argue that Morris maintains throughout his work a "commitment to an idea of redemptive violence" (135). Hanson argues that, in *The Pilgrims of Hope* specifically, Morris "contributes to wider cultural and religious myths of the glorious possibilities of transformational violence" (136). Regarding *A Dream of John Ball*, meanwhile, she argues that "violence is the necessary means of social transformation and the paradoxical price of equal and harmonious community" (146). In *News from Nowhere*, finally, Hanson argues that "[t]he idea that violence can bring about peace is more fully developed … than in any of Morris's other works", and that the text functions as "a passionate presentation of the renewing power of physical violence acting on the bodies and minds of the working class to bring about transformation" (156). As I have shown above, there is certainly a good deal in Morris's socialist writing to validate this argument – Morris is, at times, prepared to conceive of violence as a positive or generative political force, and to deploy heightened or romanticised images of violence in his broader picture of revolutionary action. But to take this occasional tendency as a *complete* characterisation of Morris's conception of revolutionary change would be to overstate the case, focussing unduly on violence alone to the exclusion of the bigger picture.

Hanson accuses Morris of perpetuating a "myth of redemptive *corporeal* violence" (166; emphasis added) in his works of political literature, but in *News from Nowhere*, *The Pilgrims of Hope* and *A Dream of John Ball* actual images of bodies being explicitly subjected to violence for the sake of the revolution are difficult to find. Indeed, as will be seen, many of the ostensibly violent

scenes in *News from Nowhere*, *A Dream of John Ball* and *The Pilgrims of Hope* are in fact hardly violent at all in Hanson's corporeal sense. This is a factor which Hanson's argument misses: the fact of violent confrontation may be present as one element in Morris's vision of class struggle, and it may very occasionally be heroic or thrilling, but the relatively muted way in which it is portrayed in the majority of cases suggests that it is very far from being a *central* element as she claims. What is much more prominent in Morris's vision is, in a broader sense, the rhetoric of confrontation, conflict and struggle, mostly shorn of a sense of explicit violence. The driving force of Morris's imagined workers' revolution clearly lies elsewhere. The battle scene in *A Dream of John Ball*, for example, contains much loosing of arrows and blowing of horns, but explicit depictions of violent injury or death are present mainly in abstracted sense. Either they are hinted at through distinctly non-corporeal means – a shout or a cry (246; 249), referred to euphemistically, as when "one of the arbalestiers fell outright" (249), or reported after the fact: "I saw four lying on the field dead or sore wounded" (250); "the knights fled and the sheriff dead: two of the lawyer kind slain afield, and one hanged" (252). Dead bodies do appear later in the narrative, at the point when the narrator enters the church with John Ball to look upon the bodies of the slain. In this scene there is one reference to actual bodily violence – the only such direct reference in the text – when the narrator remarks that "some of them had been sore smitten and hacked in the fray". But other than this fleeting observation, the dead bodies appear more like statues – still images of serenity and eternal repose rather than objects of violence. One, for example, has "been shot … and his face was calm and smooth. He had been a young man fair and comely, with hair flaxen almost to whiteness; he lay there in his clothes as he had fallen, the hands crossed over his breast and holding a rush cross" (264). Here, in contrast with Morris's earlier "Old-Norse-set-piece-arias of butchery and conflagration" which, as Florence S. Boos notes, appear in such earlier works of Norse fantasy as *Sigurd the Volsung* (1876) ("Dystopian Violence" 34), Morris appears reluctant to depict the rebel peasants engaging in acts of

confrontation which are explicitly violent. Moreover, the battle scene itself is only a relatively small part of *A Dream of John Ball*. Most of the text is taken up with scenes of communal gathering, collective discussion, political speech-making (230) and an extended meditation on the meaning and purpose of struggle (231).

Similar points to those made above about *A Dream of John Ball* can be made about *The Pilgrims of Hope*. Again, at surface level, its characters are depicted as engaging in violent struggle, in this case taking part in the fighting which accompanied the end of the Paris Commune in 1871. The violent struggle in this case is of a more self-sacrificial nature than in *John Ball*: near to the end of the poem, Richard is bound for Paris, and bears a particular thought in mind: "'…for me I know my part, / In Paris to do my utmost, and there in Paris to die!'" (400). Hanson argues that this sacrificial element is key to Morris's myth of redemptive violence (166), and the rhetoric of noble sacrifice is certainly present in the poem. An examination of the *only* portrayal of an actual *act* of self-sacrifice in the poem, however, reveals very little violent detail at all: "I saw a man who was running and crouching, stagger and fall" (407). This is the character Arthur, introduced earlier in the poem. Arthur is in love with Richard's wife, part of a love triangle between the three characters, all of whom have travelled to Paris together. Richard, who is rendered unconscious, wakes shortly afterwards, whereupon he is informed that a shell-fragment has "slain [his wife outright]" as she ran towards the injured Arthur, who had been "struck by a bullet" (408). This is no elaborately rendered portrait of a death made glorious by violent self-sacrifice. And as for specific acts of violence perpetrated by the revolutionary characters themselves against their enemies – or even references to any such acts – there are none whatsoever. Morris's portrayal of battle, or "the fighting", is limited to abstracted references: "we faced the matter well" (405); "[w]e wrought in a narrow circle" (406); "we lived amid the bullets" (407).

In *News from Nowhere*, finally, the same pattern is played out, though in a different way. The revolutionary action in the novel is, of course, portrayed

in a straightforward manner relatively devoid of rhetorical flourishes – the depictions are the clearly recounted recollections of a witness. As I have shown above, the revolutionary process in *News* does contain a violent element, which is shown to be generative and transformative, but to argue that acts of violence characterise a *significant* part of Morris's vision of a communist revolution is to ignore the broadly conceived process of confrontation and struggle which Morris sets out in the novel. "'[C]ivil war'" (130) is indeed the name given to the process of struggle which leads to the destruction of capitalism and the (eventual) implementation of communism, but this is by no means a war which is wholly, or even mostly violent. This is hinted at firstly when William Guest asks old Hammond what he means by referring to the revolution as a "'war'": "'Do you mean actual fighting with weapons … or the strikes and lock-outs and starvation of which we have heard?'" Old Hammond replies "'Both, both'" (104). In spite of Hammond's words, however, "'actual fighting with weapons'" is to be found very rarely indeed in his recollection of the revolution. Much more emphasis is put on organisation, or "'[learning] to combine'" (107), which forces the ruling class to give more and more ground to the workers.

The organisation of the workers – tempered with experience (122) and given impetus by anger (125) – is manifested not in a fighting force but in a "'new network of workmen's associations'" (120), which endeavours to try a "'weapon which they thought stronger than street-fighting'": a general strike (121). This strike forces the reactionary parties into occasional spasms of desperate violence (123-124; 128) and a brief conciliatory period with the rebels. The peace does not last, however – the reactionary parties, hopelessly threatened, finally break out into open violence and a brief civil war ensues (notice that the aggression comes from above and is only responded to from below). This civil war is the "'declared revolutionary period'" referred to earlier, the result of which is the final victory of the revolutionary working class and the beginning of the development of communist society. Morris only briefly refers to this period of civil war, which is itself only brief in duration, and again portrays

no specific acts of violence, injury or death related to it. Indeed, Old Hammond recalls that any focussed acts of destructive violence on the part of the workers are directed at commodities and their means of production rather than at people themselves (130). Even the victory of the workers in this civil war is shown to be mostly the result of the desertion and surrender of their opponents rather than killing and bloodshed (129-130). On the whole, then, Morris maintains an emphasis not on the violent aspects of the revolution, but on its political ones: organisation, forceful but mostly non-violent confrontation and, as will be seen, affective and mental liberation. Indeed, apart from the recollection of "'dry-blow fighting'" which Old Hammond provides, the only scene of violence rendered in any actual detail is one in which reactionary authorities fall upon a gathering of mostly unarmed workers (115-117) – a scene more akin to St Peter's Field in 1819 than, for example, Petrograd in 1917. Importantly, Old Hammond's recollection of the revolution leading to the foundation of Nowhere is Morris's most detailed picture of any kind of revolutionary process to be found anywhere in his work. It is this part of *News from Nowhere* in particular which demonstrates most convincingly the fact that though Morris saw the process of revolution as one of confrontation and struggle, yet actual violence was in fact to be only a partial aspect of it at most. The focus was much more on the cultivation of solidarity and collective strength, which would in the end cause the forces of reaction to simply fade into silence, albeit with a brief, violent crescendo.

Throughout all three of these works, then, conflict broadly conceived does not necessarily entail violence in a specific sense. There is indeed a violent *element* in Morris's conception of workers engaged in revolutionary action – which, as I have shown above, occasionally becomes thrilling, or takes on a sense of the heroic – but it is a comparatively small element when viewed as part of Morris's conception of a workers' revolution as a whole. It is not, vitally, in a fundamentally violent sense that Morris conceives of a militarised working class – in this important respect Morris is similar to Robert Owen. Rather than concentrating solely on mythologising or romanticising acts of

revolutionary violence, Morris is, as will be seen, much more concerned with deploying a certain rhetoric of conflict in his portrayal of the revolutionary process, in order to create an image of the working class in which it comes to adopt a particular revolutionary state of being. This state of being is primarily affective, centred around concepts such as bravery, stalwartness, self-sacrifice (in a non-violent sense) and activity (as opposed to passivity). Morris's workers – organised, active and determined – refuse to be cowed by fear or the scale of the task at hand, and are prepared to engage in struggle and confrontation in a far broader sense than simply violently overthrowing the present regime. As I will argue, it is in this way that the revolutionary proletariat of Morris's imagination is militaristic – not in the sense of being violent or destructive, but in the sense of fostering a certain form of stalwart, active and dedicated self-discipline. In spite of its militaristic nature, this self-discipline is not imposed through militaristic *methods* – that is, from above, through training and manipulation, as Owen would see it done – but rather through the nourishment and release of latent affective energies, out of which emerges a revolutionary impetus.

Self-Discipline and the Revolutionary State of Being

Just as in *News from Nowhere* Morris's utopia is shown to be centred around a certain state of being – the affective state of pleasure – so too is the process by which it will be achieved. The really urgent tasks which, for Morris, lie ahead of the working class are those of "organization and administration" ("Communism" 269). But in order for this to happen, it is necessary for the working class to adopt a certain state of being, or an attitude, which will be the generating and sustaining force for material action. Morris puts this very succinctly when he declares the following: "Intelligence enough to conceive, courage enough to will, power enough to compel. If our ideas of a new Society are anything more than a dream, these three qualities must animate the due effective majority of the working people" (266). Power is the final, material

manifestation of courage, and intelligence, as will be seen, is partially its source. But it is courage – which stands for the militaristic state of being that Morris imagines the revolutionary working class adopting – that is the mainstay.

I have called Morris's revolutionary state of being militaristic. This is, as I have said, not because Morris imagines the revolutionary worker picking up a rifle and heading to the barricades, but because he imagines them taking on the characteristics of a battle-ready soldier: undaunted by danger, willing to take personal risks for a greater cause, steadfastly committed to the attainment of the ultimate goal and prepared to take definite action in its pursuit. This state of being is often rendered, moreover, in militaristic language, but the emphasis is firmly on particular mental and emotional states. This is primarily evident in Morris's works of fiction and poetry, but it is also present to a degree in his non-fiction. In "Dawn of a New Epoch", written in 1886 during the high point of his revolutionary optimism, Morris looks forward to the coming struggle: "The silent sap of the years is being laid aside for open assault; the men are gathering under arms in the trenches … no longer trifling with little solacements of the time of weary waiting, but looking forward to mere death or the joy of victory" (121-122). Obviously, workers are not *actually* arming themselves, nor are they assembling in trenches, waiting for the order to attack. These images are, rather, symbolic of a greater change: passive acceptance gives way to determined action, the ultimate object of attainment – victory – is clear, and the risk of defeat presents no deterrent. In "True and False Society", meanwhile, Morris makes clear that, in his view, the work of revolution will require "the most strenuous effort in the teeth of violent resistance" (215). Again, there is a distinct emphasis on readiness for action, and on a willingness to take that action in the face of considerable risk.

Of course, as I have said, it is in *News from Nowhere*, and especially in *The Pilgrims of Hope* and *A Dream of John Ball*, that the most potent images of Morris's revolutionary state of being are to be found. To return to a quotation from *News from Nowhere*: as the revolutionary process which Old Hammond

recounts reaches its climax, he tells Guest that "'The sloth, the hopelessness, and … the cowardice of the last century, had given place to the eager, restless heroism of a declared revolutionary period'" (128). It is precisely the collective assumption of this attitude on the part of the workers which allows a communist society to be brought about – it is also precisely the revolutionary state of being which Morris envisions as necessary for revolutionary action. Against inertia and cowardice there is bravery and the will to act.

The explicitly militaristic aspects of this attitude are more evident still in *The Pilgrims of Hope*. The character Richard, newly released from prison, grows exasperated at the "dumb and deedless" (395) poor. He wishes that they would adopt a different attitude, which he goes on to demonstrate as he ventriloquises his imagined ideal revolutionary worker:

> 'What are these tales of old time of men who were mighty in war?
> They fought for some city's dominion, for the name of a forest or field;
> They fell that no alien's token should be blazoned on their shield;
> And for this is their valour praised and dear is their renown,
> And their names are beloved for ever and they wear the patriot's crown;
> And shall we then wait in the streets and this heap of misery,
> Till their stones rise up to help us or the far heavens set us free?
> For we, we shall fight for no name, no blazon on banner or shield;
> But that man to man may hearken and the earth her increase yield…'
> (396)

In this passage, Morris very explicitly links the end goal of the communist project with the values and attitudes typically associated with the romantic soldier-hero of chronicle, saga or romance: bravery, firm fixation on a particular cause (even if it means death) and strength. Elsewhere in *Pilgrims* these values and attitudes are related, again very explicitly, to a more modern idea of a soldier, rather than the medieval knight or classical hero:

> Let us fear--and press forward where few dare to go;
> Let us falter in hope--and plan deeds for the morrow,
> The world crowned with freedom, the fall of the foe.
>
> As the soldier who goes from his homestead a-weeping,
> And whose mouth yet remembers his sweetheart's embrace,
> While all round about him the bullets are sweeping,
> But stern and stout-hearted dies there in his place (373-374)

The military attitude is slightly modified here, in that it now involves not only the adoption of the familiar characteristics of bravery and activity but also the mastery of other counterproductive states: fear and faltering hope. Here is the vital element of self-discipline which emerges in Morris's revolutionary state of being. The emphasis throughout remains on particular affective states as the spurs of action, and those affective states must be cultivated in the individual through the exercise of control over negative emotions. This continues on to the poem's final lines, when Richard returns home, alone, to his son:

> I came not here to be bidding my happiness farewell,
> And to nurse my grief and to win me the gain of a wounded life,
> That because of the bygone sorrow may hide away from the strife.
> I came to look to my son, and myself to get stout and strong,
> That two men there might be hereafter to battle against the wrong;
> And I cling to the love of the past and the love of the day to be,
> And the present, it is but the building of the man to be strong in me.
> (408)

Once again there is the rejection of grief and sorrow – which are disabling states – and the embrace of a state of readiness for action. This state has, noticeably, become partly physical in character, with its emphasis on strength – the self-discipline required of the worker is revealed to be not only mental but, in this instance, bodily. Fuelling this process, all the while, is the impetus of a particular affective state, in this case a kind of steadfast fixation on the fulfilment of the task at hand.

In *A Dream of John Ball*, of course, Morris presents his most sustained description of actual physical conflict. This physical conflict, vitally, takes place within the context of political struggle, without which such violence would be meaningless: John Ball, in a speech given before the battle, tells the assembled rebels that "'the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship's sake that ye do them…'" (230). Once again, this act of political struggle is given its impetus by an affective state. The rebel peasants make their final charge with "the hope of better times lifting up their hearts" (252). And again, the specific characteristics which generate and sustain this state of being are those of bravery, fearlessness and self-discipline, something which

is revealed in the narrator's dialogue with the character of John Ball after the battle. The narrator states his belief that "'though I die and end, yet mankind yet liveth, therefore I end not, since I am a man'" He identifies this spirit of fellowship in John Ball too: "'and even so thou deemest, good friend; or at least even so thou doest, since now thou art ready to die in grief and torment rather than be unfaithful to the Fellowship'" (265). The all-important emphasis on bravery in the face of death appears again here. The narrator then identifies this same quality of steadfast bravery in the actions of "'many a poor man unnamed and unknown'", which, he says, are essentially what keep humanity from collapsing into nothingness, and what, by implication, compel its progress: "'if this were not so, the world would not live, but would die, smothered by its own stink'". Those who do not act with such bravery and such steadfastness, meanwhile, are representative of a failure to master their own negative emotions – a failure to properly exercise self-discipline: "'they that do less than this, fail because of fear, and are ashamed of their cowardice, and make many tales to themselves to deceive themselves, lest they should grow too much ashamed to live'" (266). The state of brave, active revolutionary being has an inverse for Morris, which is the state of fear, shame and self-deceit.

In spite of their apparent differences, then, Morris has in common with Owen his construction of a noticeably militaristic image of the working class engaged in the creation of the new society. Morris, like Owen, embraces a particular characteristic of militarism – in this case a militaristic state of mind, as opposed to Owen's organisational militarism. For Morris, it is necessary for the working class to adopt precisely this militaristic state of mind in order to bring about fundamental change. Moreover, Morris, again like Owen, sees the cultivation of this characteristic as a matter of *discipline*: it is a question of mastery and control of certain presently existing qualities within the workers themselves. For Owen these qualities are the laziness and selfishness which the nature of industrial society has forced upon the working class, whereas for Morris they are the innate human emotions of fear and doubt. Finally, both

Morris and Owen put emphasis on the non-violent aspects of their own visions of the militarised working class. Owen, obviously, remained totally opposed to any kind of class conflict, whereas Morris quite evidently did not. But, nonetheless, where Owen focussed on the organisational potential of an imposed militaristic discipline without actually intending a war of any sort, Morris took as *his* focus the generative and sustaining potential of a militaristic state of being. This state of being might, occasionally, lead to violence, but as Old Hammond's account of an actual communist revolution in *News from Nowhere* demonstrates, it was equally capable of giving impetus to transformative revolutionary action in a much broader sense.

Another important difference between Owen and Morris regarding the notion of a militarised state of being is the source of the discipline necessary for that state's cultivation. For Owen, as I have argued, it is administered from without. For Morris, on the other hand, it is generated from within. The generating force in this instance is, once again, affective, constituted by the release of latent emotional energies. The engine which, for Morris, drives working-class organisation and action, and spurs on the exercise of the militaristic self-discipline outlined above, is a groundswell of feeling. Such feeling is not necessarily particularly specific, and it appears in different forms in different texts. Nonetheless, all these forms possess a common theme: it is the ironclad bonds of deeply felt emotion which first bind working-class movements together and drive them to adopt the more specific revolutionary state of being identified above.

In *News from Nowhere*, the emotional engine of working-class organisation and action appears in a number of different forms. At one point, it is manifested as a kind of latent human desire for freedom and fellowship: Old Hammond recalls that "'the great motive-power of the change was a longing for freedom and equality … a sickness of heart that rejected with loathing the aimless solitary life'" (104-105). Here it is worth noting certain parallels with the idea of "primitive communism" theorised by Engels, as well as by Bax. This notion, premised especially upon a particular notion of

Teutonic tribal organisation, held that within certain pre-feudal societies there was a form of "[p]rimitive collective ownership and … social morality fostered by kinship organisation" (Vaninskaya, *The Idea of Community* 104). This form of society represented a kind of unconscious socialism, which was held back from becoming complete socialism by its limitation to the unit of the tribe. The advent of complete socialism, then, would constitute an extension of this primitive socialism – this "principle of association" – across the globe, resulting in "a feeling of fellowship encompassing all the inhabitants of the earth" (87). Hyndman also held a similar view, though in a less directly historical way – he, like Morris and many other socialists, believed that working people "possessed the unsurpassed virtue of solidarity, the 'feeling of fellowship' … All that was needed to transform this unconscious communal tendency into socialist fellowship was a political awakening" (168). In *News from Nowhere*, Morris appears to incorporate this notion of primitive or unconscious socialist feeling into his image of the emotional impetus which acts as the driving force for revolutionary change.

As well as an instinct for freedom and fellowship, there is, in *News from Nowhere*, the powerful feeling of anger, which again spurs on transformative working-class action. After the novel's major incident of extreme reactionary violence, perpetrated against mostly unarmed people,[84] "'[the people's] feeling was one of anger rather than fear…'" (117). This anger ferments, and in the end the workers "'[learn] to despise their rulers, [and do] away with their dependence upon them'" (125), leading them on to their final confrontation with the old order. And not only is there popular anger, there is also an alignment of popular feeling in a more general sense: the working-class revolutionary organisations are shown to have "'depended not on a carefully arranged centre with all kinds of checks and counter-checks about it, but on a huge mass of people in thorough sympathy with the movement'" (121). The particular term

[84] Such an incident calls to mind the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, as well as the more recent Bloody Sunday of 1887. The latter was, of course, a highly formative experience for Morris in political terms.

"'sympathy'" here is important: rather than merely being in agreement with the movement (intellectually aligned with it), or in alliance with it (practically aligned), the mass of the workers identify with its aims on a deeper level: the level of emotion. Again, in a less specific way, it is this groundswell of emotion from which all the other aspects of revolutionary action take their impetus.

In *A Dream of John Ball*, Morris again emphasises this non-specific but highly intense emotional identification with the political cause of socialism, out of which arises the necessary state of being for revolutionary action. A particularly demonstrative example of this is the response of the rebel peasants to John Ball's speech at the cross, in which the latter outlines the proto-communist ethic behind Morris's version of the Peasant's Revolt, declaring "'fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell: fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death'" (230). The audience of this speech respond with barely contained emotional outbursts:

> amongst them were many who by this time were not dry-eyed, and some wept outright … I looked at Will Green beside me: his right hand clutched his bow so tight, that the knuckles whitened; he was staring straight before him, and the tears were running out of his eyes and down his big nose as though without his will… (231)

John Ball continues his speech, and again the audience respond to it in an emotional way: "[they] were moved indeed and saw the road before them" (234). The emotional response gives way to clarity of purpose, which, as it grows, in turn creates a readiness for active struggle: "As he said the words there came a stir among the weapons of the throng, and they pressed closer round the cross" (235). An emotional identification with the (proto)socialist cause is the catalyst which leads to resolution and action.

The Pilgrims of Hope presents perhaps the most emotionally charged depiction of socialist struggle. Florence S. Boos has argued that "the poem's central exhortation" is that "political action [should] end as well as begin in love" ("Narrative Design" 152). This is certainly true, although it is worth noting also the multi-faceted nature of the emotional outpouring which drives the action of the revolutionaries in the poem. There is, first, a kind of dizzying joy: "And now

the streets seem gay and the high stars glittering bright; / And for me, I sing amongst them, for my heart is full and light. / I see the deeds to be done and the day to come on the earth, / And riches vanished away and sorrow turned to mirth". This emotional state, again, appears to usher in Morris's revolutionary state of militaristic readiness for conflict and action: "And we a part of it all--we twain no longer alone / In the days to come of the pleasure, in *the days that are of the fight*" (384; emphasis added). Not only is there joy, there is also hope: "…if half of those millions [of workers] knew / The hope that my heart hath learned, we should find a deed to do, / And who or what should withstand us?" (388). Again, the generating force is a feeling – felt in the heart – which leads to preparedness for action, action which *again* is figured as conflict. Finally, there is love – not only the joys and pains of romantic love as experienced by the main characters, but the more universal feeling of deep identification with and concern for the fate of the world as a whole:

> So fared they [the Communards], giftless ever, and no help of fortune sought. / Their life was thy deliverance, O Earth, and for thee they fought; / Mid the jeers of the happy and deedless, mid failing friends they went / To their foredoomed fruitful ending on the love of thee intent. (404)

The form of intense universal love which these revolutionary figures possess allows them, once again, to engage in revolutionary struggle, characterised by extreme (almost reckless) bravery and determination in the face of almost certain destruction.

Robert Owen did not believe, as Morris did, that such deeply felt emotions could provide the impetus for his kind of disciplined, militaristic revolutionary action. As I have argued earlier, Owen instead had a tendency to view the working class as a machine, to which technical changes might be made in order to optimise its capacities. Morris, on the other hand, was the inheritor of an anti-mechanical ethic[85] advanced earlier in the nineteenth

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[85] Morris was not entirely opposed to machines, of course – he was happy to see them used to save labour in a truly useful way ("How We Live" 19) – but he *was* opposed to the entire system of production being centered around machinery, to the degradation of workers, who were thus deprived of useful, dignified, ennobling labour:

century by figures such as Thomas Carlyle[86] and John Ruskin.[87] Such an objection to the mechanical organisation of life also formed one of Morris's principle objections to Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), a novel detailing a technologically futuristic socialist utopia where all labour is administered by a central authority, in response to which Morris was moved to write *News from Nowhere*.[88] Indeed, Morris sometimes characterised the forces of capital as a machine: in *The Pilgrims of Hope*, for example, the Communards fight against the "brutal war-machine, the ruthless grinder of bale", a fight in which they are as hopeless as "the village weaver 'gainst the power-loom" (406). Morris was not, therefore inclined to see the working class in a mechanistic fashion – indeed, one of his criticisms of capitalist society was that it saw workers in precisely this way ("Monopoly" 251) – and so he would not have believed Owen's method of creating socialists to be an effective one in any sense. It was his belief that the emotional catalyst for revolutionary self-discipline should emerge from within workers in a way which was, instead, distinctly *organic*.

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it is, for Morris, "the allowing machines to be our masters and not our servants that so injures the beauty of life nowadays" (24).

[86] Carlyle, in his essay for the *Edinburgh Review* entitled "Signs of the Times" (1829), had argued that the nineteenth century was "above all others, [a] Mechanical Age … the Age of Machinery" (59), something which had ultimately led to a "deep, paralysed subjection to physical objects" (80-81). This attachment was at the expense of intangible, spiritual and ethical values, not subject to measurement or calculation, values like "wisdom", "heroic worth" and "old nobleness" (81).

[87] In the chapter from *The Stones of Venice* entitled "The Nature of Gothic", Ruskin focusses on machine-labour, which, for Ruskin, flattens and de-sanctifies the worker and the object of that worker's labour alike, depriving them of the ability to manifest in the material world the inner truth of their divine humanity. "If you will have … precision out of [the worker]", he declares, and make their fingers measures degrees like cog-wheels, and their arms strike curves like compasses, you must unhumanize them. All the energy of their spirits must be given to make cogs and compasses of themselves" (*The Stones of Venice* 2: 162).

[88] Bellamy's vision is, of course, one which has considerably more in common with Owen's ideas than with Morris's. Morris essentially rejected it: "a machine-life is the best which Mr. Bellamy can imagine for us on all sides" (Morris, "Looking Backward" 505), he wrote in a review of the novel. For Morris, this "multiplication of machinery will just – multiply machinery" (506) – it will only lessen necessary labour, rather than transforming it into the central pleasure of life, which is Morris's great hope.

Organic metaphors, in reference to the development of working-class consciousness and organisation, occur throughout Morris's writing. In *News from Nowhere*, Old Hammond tells Guest that, as the revolution continued, "a new network of workmen's associations *grew* up very speedily" (120; emphasis added). In *The Pilgrims of Hope*, a similar image of organic growth occurs: "Like the seed of midwinter, unheeded, unparished / Like the autumn-sown wheat 'neath the snow lying green, … So the hope of the people now buddeth and groweth" (371). In *Monopoly*, meanwhile, Morris declares that "the existence of a superior class living on an inferior implies that there is a constant struggle going on between them; whatever the inferior class can do to better itself at the expense of the superior it both can and must do, just as a plant must needs grow towards the light" (245). This recurring organic metaphor illustrates a vital point about Morris's conception of the working class preparing itself for revolutionary action – whereas a machine requires an operative, a plant or similar organism grows via some innate impulse, without compulsion. This lack of outside direction is another essential part of Morris's vision of the revolutionary working class: it *must*, ultimately, be responsible for its own liberation – "it is the workers themselves that must bring about the change" ("Monopoly" 251).

The plant, of course, begins as a seed, and requires nourishment from outside of itself. For Morris, as well as many of his fellow socialists, this nourishment of the seed of proletarian discontent took the twin forms of experience and education. Experience meant specifically experience gained in the face of exploitation and disappointment, and in the waxing and waning fortunes of "the organisational efforts forced upon the workers by their own circumstances" (Vaninskaya, *The Idea of Community* 182). In *News from Nowhere*, for example, emphasis is put on "'the long series of years during which the workmen had learned to despise their rulers'" (125). But it was education particularly upon which Morris fixed his hopes, as did many of his fellow socialists. Unlike Owen – who, although he had never ceased to publish books and pamphlets, give speeches and submit petitions in support of his

own ideas, was ultimately more inclined to address leaders of industry, statesmen and even aristocrats than he was to communicate directly with workers themselves – Morris took it upon himself to disseminate the creed of socialism amongst the working class as often as he could. Indeed, when Morris died, the family doctor declared that he had "died a victim to his enthusiasm for spreading the principles of Socialism" (qtd. in R. Taylor 23). Later in his life, his optimism about the imminence of revolution having very much faded ("Communism" 269), Morris came to place a good deal more emphasis on this process than any other part of socialist action: "…it is necessary in the present to give form to vague aspirations which are in the air about [the workers], and to raise their aims above the mere businesslike work of the old trades unions" ("Communism" 269). Indeed, the task of 'making socialists' – of educating the working classes about the true nature of their condition under capitalism, and about the remedy to this condition which socialism could provide – was one of the most common forms of socialist activity in the late nineteenth century, whether in the form of newspapers, publications, lectures or street-preaching.[89] As Phillipa Bennett notes, "In the discourse of political agitation of the late-nineteenth-century Socialist movement, education was identified as playing a fundamental role in preparing and provoking revolution" (Educating for Utopia" 65). This was not only to be an appeal to the emotions – the

[89] Such methods, especially the latter, might suggest that socialist movements of the late nineteenth century possessed a certain religious quality, and indeed the cultivation and proselytisation of a "religion of socialism" was a significant part of the activity of socialist organisations of that time. As well as such phenomena as socialist Sunday schools, Labour Churches and organisations such as the Christian socialist Guild of St Matthew (Vaninskaya, *The Idea of Community* 178), there existed broader similarities between socialist groups and religious groups: there were "[s]ocialist street-corner orators, competing with the Salvation Army for the attention of the working class" who "resembled nothing so much as missionaries fishing for the souls of the unbelievers" (175). Moreover, the "spirit of utopianism and the rhetoric of political conversion pervaded the entire movement to some extent" (178). Not only did socialist organisations take on certain religious aspects, but, as Mark Bevir demonstrates, certain religious groups also took on aspects of socialism. The notable example is the Labour Church, the defining belief of which was the "conviction the labor movement was the means of realizing socialism and so the Kingdom of God" (281). For a broad survey of the notion of a religion of socialism, see "A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain" by Stephen Yeo.

purpose was to "[convert] the workers to an *understanding* of, and ardent desire for Socialism" (Morris, "Communism" 266; emphasis added).

Understanding, along with experience, was, then, supposed to temper and direct affective energy. There is a particularly potent depiction of this process in *The Pilgrims of Hope*, where a communist street-preacher – "thickset and short, and dressed in shabby blue", bearing obvious similarities to Morris himself – effectively converts Richard to the socialist cause: "He spoke, were it well, were it ill, as though a message he bore … Of peace and good-will he told, and I knew that in faith he spake, / But his words were my very thoughts, and I saw the battle awake, / And I followed from end to end; and triumph grew in my heart". The message which the Morris figure imparts to Richard is one which gives him courage and inspires him to play his part in the coming struggle, but in fact the instinct towards this conclusion was already latent within him – he is simply having his *own* thoughts clarified, which in turn drives him to action. Indeed, it is important to Morris that this education into socialism does not constitute an exertion of control or authority over the working class, but only a nourishment of its innate capabilities. In *Whigs, Democrats and Socialists*, he writes, "[O]ur hopes force us to try to get a hearing from the people. Nor can one tell how far our words will carry, so to say. The most moderate exposition of our principles will bear with it the seeds of disruption; nor can we tell what form that disruption will take" (36). The socialist educators can only catalyse those seeds into life (another organic image) – the direction in which the plant will grow cannot be controlled.[90]

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[90] It should be noted that Morris was not *absolutely* immune to adopting patronising or misanthropic attitudes towards the working class. At times, echoing Owen's tendency to glorify an image of the reformed worker which was to come but to denigrate the working class as it existed at the time, his vision of those members of the working class who were unwilling to listen to his message, or who had yet to understand it, could sometimes be one of palpable dislike, almost revulsion. They are, for example, "dull and abased as the very filth of the road" (*Pilgrims of Hope* 390). This attitude was one which other middle-class socialists occasionally exhibited, notably Hyndman (Vaninskaya, *The Idea of Community* 166-167). These flashes of misanthropy do not, however, really represent the whole of Morris's vision of the working class – as I have shown, he was ultimately dedicated to facilitating working-class agency and self-organisation.

Morris did not, then, envision socialists like himself exercising any kind of overt control over the working class as it progressed towards the realisation of communist society. What he did envision, however – especially in his works of socialist literature depicting class struggle in its various forms – was a revolutionary working class adopting a specific set of characteristics during that progression. Though Morris would not impose such characteristics in any kind of coercive sense, nonetheless their adoption by the working class was, as he saw it, a necessity if a communist revolution was to be successful. As I have argued, the characteristics in question were to possess particular militaristic dimensions, and indeed a certain militaristic emphasis is common to the visions of both Owen and Morris. Moreover, both Owen and Morris see this militarisation as being in the service of a revolutionary process in which the main emphasis is on something other than violence. For Owen, of course, the process is almost entirely non-violent, indeed it is devoid of any sort of conflict whatsoever. For Morris, the process is mostly focussed on forms of confrontation and struggle other than violence, though it does not exclude the notion of heroic or thrilling violence completely, and makes some use of violent imagery. Where Owen and Morris diverge in a really significant sense, however, is in their conception of the specific nature of the *process* of proletarian militarisation. Owen, as I have argued, seeks to militarise the working class in an organisational sense, imposing rigid structure and discipline in order to create an army of labour. This is possible because he views the currently-existing working class as essentially idiotic or devoid of reason – at times animalistic, at times mechanical – and therefore easily manipulated and reformed. Morris, conversely, poured scorn on Edward Bellamy's version of this idea (he did not seem to perceive it in Owen), declaring that "the *impression* which he produces is that of a huge standing army, tightly drilled, compelled by some mysterious fate to unceasing anxiety for the production of wares to satisfy every caprice, however wasteful and

absurd, that may cast up amongst them" ("Looking Backward" 504-505). Instead, Morris constructs an image of a working class which is militarised in terms of particular personal qualities and affective states: steadfastness, dedication, bravery, activity, even recklessness. The source and generating power of the discipline which is required for the adoption of this state of being is, contrary to Owen, an abundance of emotion which arises from *within* the workers themselves, brought to fruition by experience and by the educational activities of socialists.

"Intelligence enough to conceive, courage enough to will, power enough to compel" ("Communism" 266): these were the three vital characteristics which the working class would have to adopt if they were to transform society. It was courage in particular, however, which would be the engine of the change. An attitude of courage or determined fortitude was likewise of considerable importance to the Chartist movement of the mid-nineteenth century, which faced concerted and at times violent opposition. Chartists themselves maintained morale through, among other things, the composition and distribution of Chartist literature, especially poetry, of which there was a positive abundance during the period of Chartist activity. One of the most prominent poets of Chartism was Ernest Jones, with whom, alongside Morris, the next chapter is concerned.

Ernest Jones, William Morris and the Role of the Radical Poet

Section I: The Mass-Movement of Chartism and the Contest of the Individual and the Collective in Ernest Jones's Chartist Poetry

From its beginnings on Glasgow Green in 1838 to its dramatic apotheosis a decade later on Kennington Common, and on into the years of its terminal decline after 1852, one of the most prominent attributes of Chartism was its mass character. As Malcolm Chase has shown in his book *Chartism: A New History*, the Chartist movement included within its ranks an extraordinarily broad range of people, drawn from a variety of different professions and social classes. Though Chartism derived the majority of its support from the industrial working classes of England, Scotland and Wales, a declared Chartist could, in theory, be almost anyone: not only a gentleman landowner like Feargus O'Connor (Chartism's figurehead for most of its existence) (Chase 11), but also a minister of the Church of Scotland (49), a powerloom weaver (230), a schoolteacher (184), a farm labourer turned soldier (152), the tailor son of a West Indian slave (305), or even a school-age child (264). A Chartist, moreover, could be from almost any*where*: from Dundee to Brighton, from Newport to Norwich and from Bradford to Bath there could be found groups of people proudly bearing the name of Chartist.

Chartism extended its political outlook beyond Great Britain too. Chartism was by no means uniformly internationalist – at times, indeed, it was felt by many Chartists that care should be taken to distinguish Chartism from revolutionary movements on the European continent (Chase 287-288). Nonetheless, internationalism – represented in the main by an organisation known as the Fraternal Democrats – had its place within the Chartist political vision. The plight of Poland, especially, represented a cause around which many British Chartists rallied (particularly after the Cracow insurgency in 1846), but close links with a broad range of democrats, patriots and revolutionaries from places such as Italy, France and Germany were also

maintained (287). Ireland, of course, was the focus of much Chartist attention and sympathy – in 1842, repeal of the Act of Union of 1801 was added to the list of secondary Chartist causes – with Irish immigrants to England and Scotland forming a considerable part of Chartism's base (202).[91]

In political terms, moreover, the Chartist movement most certainly contained multitudes. Many Chartists were newcomers to political activity, but there were also veterans of previous political campaigns and movements: former devotees of Henry Hunt (13; 143) and former followers of William Cobbett (12; 53), Owenites (250), Spenceans (167), campaigners against the New Poor Law of 1834 (15; 18-19) and those who, having campaigned for the Reform Act of 1832, now felt excluded from any of its benefits (24). Beyond the question of political origins, of course, lay the considerably thornier issue of political aims. Ostensibly, Chartism was united around the Six Points of the People's Charter: universal manhood suffrage, a secret ballot, the payment of members of parliament, the removal of property qualifications for the same, equal constituencies and annual parliamentary elections. While the passing of these points into law remained the fundamental goal of Chartism (173), the larger question of what exactly the broader implications of this change would be was a fiercely contested one. As Mike Sanders has noted, "[Chartism] is a form of thinking capable of generating many different contents" (*The Poetry of Chartism* 23). There were some, for example, who saw the implementation of the principles of the Charter as not much more than an opportunity for reconciliation between the middle and working classes (Chase 194). For others, however, especially during the later years of Chartism, the end-goal of Chartism was not just the implementation of the Charter but "The Charter and Something More" – the Six Points of the Charter were merely the starting-point for a wholesale redistribution of wealth and power (336-340).

The most consequential and divisive conflict within Chartism was centred around the all-important matter of tactics. There was, firstly, the

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[91] As Malcolm Chase shows, the relationship between British and Irish Chartists was not always straightforward (203).

overriding division between physical force Chartists, whose position was that the political establishment would only ever implement the People's Charter if it was forced to by sustained and possibly violent physical pressure, and moral force Chartists, who held that violence and threats would only ever undermine the cause of Chartism, the better course of action being to demonstrate through sustained but peaceful political campaigning that the working class was an entity capable of taking on the responsibility of democratic participation. Within and around this central tension were further differences of opinion: from 1844, for example, Feargus O'Connor and many of his fellow Chartists advocated the Land Plan, or the creation of Chartist villages – clusters of small farms, owned by their occupants, upon which Chartists and their families could live and work in a self-sustaining manner, liberated from the misery and tyranny of industrial employment.[92] Other strains of Chartism included Knowledge Chartism, which (in Owenite fashion) advocated thorough and comprehensive working-class education as the key to the liberation of that class (169-170), and Teetotal or Temperance Chartism, which saw abstinence from alcohol as the route to respectability, responsibility and, ultimately, the vote (170-171). This lack of a unity of opinion concerning political tactics corresponds, further, with the changing activities and fortunes of Chartism as a movement. At times, its energies were channelled towards the presentation of petitions, such as those of 1839, 1842 and 1848. At other times, industrial action was the declared strategy, such as in 1839 (when it failed to materialise) and 1842 (when it did not). At other times still, Chartist frustration erupted into incidents of insurrectionary violence, the most prominent of which was the Newport Rising of 1839.

Throughout the waxing and waning of its fortunes, and on all sides of its various strategic, political, cultural, geographical and class divides, one feature of Chartism remained constant: its profound and wide-ranging literary

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[92] In total, six of these villages were created, the principal settlement being O'Connorsville in Hertfordshire, which has since reverted to its original name of Heronsgate.

culture. As Dorothy Thompson and J. F. C. Harrison have stated, Chartist culture reflects "a *literate* and sophisticated working class" (xi). The importance and sophistication of Chartist literary culture has only really been the subject of critical attention for the last three or four decades. In the Soviet Union, in 1956, Yuri Kovalev compiled and published an anthology of Chartist poetry and fiction, the first of its kind, while in 1974 Martha Vicinus was among the first to take the topic of Chartist literature seriously, in her book *The Industrial Muse*. In spite of these early efforts, however, Gustav Klaus could still complain in 1985 that "whereas the historian's fascination with the [Chartist] period manifests itself in dozens of publications every year, students of English have so far deemed it worthy of little more than the occasional footnote" (46). It was in the 1980s and '90s, indeed, that the subject finally began to be taken up in earnest, with such publications as Brian Maidment's anthology of self-taught poets *The Poorhouse Fugitives* (1987), Ulrike Schwab's *The Poetry of the Chartist Movement* (1993), Isobel Armstrong's *Victorian Poetry*, (1993) (in which Chartist literature is considered as a part of Victorian poetic culture as a whole), Ian Haywood's anthology of Chartist novels (an overlooked area of an overlooked subject) entitled *The Literature of Struggle* (1995) and Anne Janowitz's *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition* (1998). Since the millennium, with the publication of Mike Sanders's *The Poetry of Chartism* (2009), Margaret A. Loose's *The Chartist Imaginary* (2014), Rob Breton's *The Oppositional Aesthetics of Chartist Fiction* (2016) and Simon Rennie's *The Poetry of Ernest Jones* (2016), the subject of Chartist literature seems finally to have attracted the degree of serious and sustained critical examination which it deserves, so that in March 2019 Miles Taylor could remark that "[t]he study of Chartism has taken a marked literary turn in the last dozen years or so" ("The Literary Turn" 1).

The textual culture of Chartism in a more general sense was, in terms of form, highly diverse, consisting of "newspaper articles, editorials, poetry, fiction, speeches, pamphlets, petitions, resolutions, meeting minutes, broadsides, correspondence, autobiographies, historical studies, and diaries"

(Loose 3). Amongst this multiplicity of forms, it was poetry which held the greatest degree of prominence. As Mike Sanders has noted, "poetry permeated the entire movement, with both leadership and rank and file sharing a common belief in its value" (*The Poetry of Chartism* 7). Though later compiled into collections and anthologies, the vast majority of Chartist poetry was received and read by Chartists themselves via the medium of the periodical and the newspaper, a medium which, as will be seen, was also adopted by the socialist movements of the later nineteenth century with which William Morris was connected. The most prominent of the Chartist periodicals was *The Northern Star* (1837-52),[93] but there were numerous others.[94] Of course, the publication of literature for the working class in the particular form of the periodical was by no means a new development: the numerous Chartist magazines and newspapers emerged out of a lengthy tradition of publications by radical pamphleteers, 'unstamped' newspaper publishers and reform-minded paternalists. Radicals such as Thomas Spence had been publishing affordable weekly or monthly pamphlets and magazines aimed at a working-class audience since the closing decades of the eighteenth century (Klaus 23), but it was particularly from 1816, after the end of the Napoleonic wars, that a distinct popular working-class literature – published in the form of the affordable periodical – began to appear. The radical tradition, first of all, continued during this time with politically combative newspapers such as William Cobbett's *Political Register* and T. J. Wooler's *Black Dwarf*, which emerged along with a resurgent post-war radicalism (Haywood, *Popular Literature* 83). After the passing of the Six acts in 1819, among the measures of which was the imposition of a stamp duty designed to make hitherto cheap radical literature unaffordable to the impoverished working class, a new phase

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[93] *The Northern Star* was hugely popular amongst working-class audiences. In 1839, for example, it recorded a weekly circulation of 36,000 to 42,000, with occasional peaks of up to 60,000. These numbers are particularly impressive given that individual copies of *The Northern Star* were often shared amongst whole groups of people (Schwab 30).

[94] For more detail on the variety of Chartist periodicals see Ian Haywood's book *The Revolution in Popular Literature* 142-149.

of popular periodical literature began (99). Though some, like Cobbett, avoided the stamp duty by reducing the size of his paper, many radical publishers simply defied the ban, in a new "'heroic' phase of the radical press, the 'unstamped' wars of the 1830s" (102), an era which left many radical publishers galvanised and determined, rather than cowed or suppressed. In the 1820s, partly in an effort to counter the explicitly political nature of radical 'unstamped' periodicals, organisations such as The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge were founded to provide an alternative popular literature devoid of radical politics (104-107). This project continued into the 1830s with such periodicals as *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* and Charles Knight's *Penny Magazine*, both of which were supposed, though in different ways, to placate or divert working people, halting the spread of radical political ideas (122-123). Of particular note is Harriet Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy*, which sold around ten thousand issues a month from 1832-33, and attempted to preach "stoicism, patience, Malthusian restraint, self-help and reciprocal respect", as well as the wisdom of *laissez-faire* economics (124). Finally, with the repeal of the stamp duty on pamphlets in 1834 and the reduction of the duty on newspapers in 1836, radical periodicals began to proliferate in greater numbers still, especially in the form of the police gazette and the radical newspaper or broadsheet (131-136). It was within this context, and out of this tradition, that the Chartist periodical emerged.

Although, in this way, the publication of Chartist poetry represents a development in the tradition of mass-market periodicals intended primarily for a working-class audience, such poetry was not limited to the written or printed word only. As Timothy Randall has pointed out, "Chartist verse possessed a context which historians find difficult to fully recover … the mass open-air gatherings, the anniversary celebrations, the reading groups, the feasts, the evening teas, the workplace lunches, the public house meetings, the extempore singing in prison" (172-173). Chartist poetry was "a literature which existed not only on the page as a literary text, but also as a social event and public demonstration" (173). Such a communal context – which, as will be seen

further on in this chapter, was something that William Morris would later try to reproduce with his *Chants for Socialists* – both encouraged and was nourished by the parallel development of a communal literature. As Isobel Armstrong has pointed out, "Chartist writers evolved a genuinely *public* rhetoric of collective action and affirmation and a genuinely social rhetoric of community" (193). This was poetry which was meant not for the isolated individual reader but for the individual as part of a larger working-class culture, as expressed through the predominantly working-class political movement of Chartism.[95] Indeed, it was precisely in this way that Chartist literature in general differed from the earlier radical literature of Spence, Cobbett or Wooler. Whereas the mass of earlier radical literature, from the 1790s to the 1830s, never quite coalesced around a particular set of political aims or values, Chartist literature was explicitly linked to the sizeable mass base of a specific and active political movement. The purpose of Chartist literature – and poetry in particular – was to shore up collective identity, galvanise collective resolve and spur on collective action.

Chartist literature was not only aimed *at* a working-class audience – which characteristic alone would not necessarily distinguish it from the mass of popular literature which swamped the market in the 1840s[96] (Haywood, *Popular Literature* 139) – it was, vitally, also very often working-class in terms of its *authorship*. While, as will be seen, certain distinguished poets and writers did gain prominence within Chartist literary culture, especially during its later years, nonetheless a huge proportion of Chartist poetry was written by working-class people themselves,[97] who often published anonymously or

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[95] As Mike Sanders has pointed out, working-class receptivity to poetry did not arrive with Chartism, but rather arose out of a pre-existing "tradition of serious reading". Central to this tradition was an enthusiasm for poets such as John Milton and Robert Burns, as well as Shakespeare, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Scott, Byron, Southey and Keats (*The Poetry of Chartism* 8).

[96] As Haywood notes, this "new type of urban literature" comprised "'penny bloods', plagiarisms of mainstream fiction (notably Dickens) and translations of racy continental fiction", as well as "the popular Sunday newspaper" (*Popular Literature* 139).

[97] Of course, it was not only within Chartist literary culture that working-class poets were being published – as Kirstie Blair has argued, Victorian newspapers (especially local newspapers) provided the platform for a thriving culture of working-class poetic

provided only their initials.[98] As Mike Sanders has noted, "rank and file Chartists … not only read but also composed poetry in their hundreds" (*The Poetry of Chartism* 7). This considerable corpus of work – what Ulrike Schwab has termed the "nucleus" of Chartist literary culture (65) – is the subject of Mike Sanders's recent book *The Poetry of Chartism*, in which he demonstrates not only the thoroughly proletarian nature of Chartist poetic production, but also shows how Chartist poetry was inextricably and intimately linked to the reality of working-class political struggle. Firstly, the very existence of Chartist poetry was understood to be a kind of political argument in itself, in that it sought to assert the right of the working class to participate in the democratic process by demonstrating the intelligence, creativity and resourcefulness of working-class people, or what Sanders calls "inherent human capacities which found their rational political expression in democracy" (15). Secondly, Chartist literature served as a means of stimulating political agency and action. It did this firstly in a practical way, through "discrete interventions in specific political debates", but it also facilitated Chartist political activity in a more profound, affective sense, by a process which Sanders calls "the total qualitative transformation of consciousness wrought by poetry". Here, Sanders argues, "political agency arises directly out of poetry's creative capacities; its ability to imagine things differently" (13). Chartist poetry, in other words, encouraged political action by nourishing Chartists' imaginative and creative capacities, enabling them to conceive of a world radically transformed, as well as their role in building that world, in a heightened and intensified way.

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production in the middle of the nineteenth century ("The Newspaper Press" 266-279). In a different article, meanwhile, Blair notes the use of poetry in mid-Victorian advertising, a common feature of newspapers at the time. Much of this poetry, Blair points out, was written, albeit anonymously, by working-class poets ("Advertising Poetry" 103-118).

[98] As Meagan Birchmore Timney has pointed out, many of these anonymous contributors are likely to have been women, and indeed working-class women were especially significant and active contributors to Chartist literary culture, within which they established "the political frame-work of a working-class women's poetics" (193).

Into this sprawling, diverse and sometimes fractured political culture of Chartism – both literary and otherwise – entered, in 1846, a young barrister named Ernest Jones. On the surface, Jones seems to embody the very opposite of Chartism's public, participatory, deeply working-class culture. He was born in 1819, in Berlin, into an aristocratic milieu. Jones's father was equerry to the Duke of Cumberland, later King of Hanover (Ernest was named after the Duke, who was also his godfather) (Saville 13). He spent his youth in Schleswig-Holstein, where he became enamoured with German romanticism.[99] During the essentially apolitical early years of his adulthood, prior to his involvement with Chartism, he had some minor success as a poet and dramatist while also managing to qualify as a barrister (a career which he took up again after Chartism's dissolution). In spite of his relatively aristocratic upbringing, however – as well as his lack of interest in political matters as a young man – Jones was to become a dedicated and energetic Chartist. How and why he came to occupy this role is a subject of some scholarly disagreement. As with William Morris, Jones's sudden entry into the world of radical politics had the sense of a conversion about it. According to his own account, Jones was persuaded to take up the Chartist cause after happening accidentally upon an issue of *The Northern Star*, reading it, and finding that it chimed with his principles (Saville 17). The author of a recent biography of Jones, Miles Taylor, takes a more cynical view: Jones, Taylor argues, had been trying and failing to find employment with the Anti-Corn Law League, as well as "doing the rounds of various theatres in the hope of finding someone to stage his dramas" (Jones had been a semi-successful dramatist before his entry into politics). In Taylor's view, Jones's first forays into Chartism were "almost certainly part of an attempt to get work and find an audience"

[99] Jones's 1841 work *The Wood-Spirit*, a two-volume epic which follows the trials of a Jutland knight named Altren, is a neat demonstration of his affinity for literary romanticism.

(*Romance of Politics* 77). It should, however, be noted here that Taylor's account of Jones's conversion to radicalism fits in neatly with his overall argument regarding Jones's political career, which is that Jones was perpetually engaged in the business of making a romance of his own life, self-dramatising and self-fashioning, little concerned with actual political principles or moral convictions. Jones, in Taylor's view, wanted little more than to dress up in Byron's clothes and play the radical aristocrat. This account has been met with some criticism, for example from Anne Janowitz, who notes in her review of Taylor's book that "[t]he bulk of Jones's life as a political activist, and his links to the European reform movements … is left untreated" ("Ernest Jones" 287). Janowitz goes on to say that "[t]he problem with this psycho-literary thesis is that it lets the author off the hook from evaluating Jones's political life" (288). It is worth, then, going back to John Saville's earlier (1952) account of Jones's entry into radical politics by way of a counterpoint. Saville points out that although Jones was by no means wealthy in 1846, he had secured the prospect of a relatively decent living as Secretary to the Leek and Mansfield Railway Company, and, as a trained barrister, would have been more than able to turn to the law for a living should he have chosen to do so (as he did with considerable success later in his life) (16-17). For Saville, Jones, inheritor of a traditional aristocratic hostility to bourgeois culture (bolstered by an early familiarity with German romanticism) (18), was moved by the "suffering and misery of so many of his fellow countrymen" (17) and, like many of his fellow Victorians, grew increasingly concerned with the "'condition of England' question" (18).

Whether or not Jones was sincere in his adoption of the Chartist cause, there can be no doubt that, once involved, he was an active participant in its political and cultural life. Not only was he a prolific poet, novelist and writer of short stories, he was also a frequent public speaker and campaigner, and from 1846 he soon cemented himself amongst the Chartist leadership. In that year he gave a speech at Blackstone Edge, in the Pennines, to an audience of twenty-five thousand people (M. Taylor, *Romance of Politics* 88). After two

years of Chartist activity, during which he consistently advocated physical force Chartism, he was arrested for a supposedly incendiary speech given at Bishop Bonner's Fields during the ill-fated Chartist gathering of 1848, found guilty of sedition and sentenced to two years in Tothill Fields Prison. His experience of prison was starkly different from that of earlier incarcerated radicals, who had traditionally enjoyed relatively favourable conditions (122-125). Upon his release in 1850 Jones again took up the Chartist cause, though by this point the movement was dwindling significantly.

Like William Morris, then, Jones was no political play-actor – he was involved in political action in a most concrete sense. Moreover – and again like Morris – much of that action was concentrated in literary production, especially (but not exclusively) the writing of poetry. Jones was one of the foremost poets of Chartism, and, though a latecomer to the cause, was an active participant in its literary culture.

Jones's poetry, in many senses, embodied the strengths of Chartist poetry in general – it was politically engaged and directed towards the Chartist audience as a collective political entity. At the same time, however, the figure of Jones as a Chartist poet is one fraught with tension and ambiguity. His work may have been public in terms of its intended audience, but it was emphatically the work of Ernest Jones the *professional* poet; the poet, moreover, whose social and cultural background was essentially alien to that of the vast majority of Chartists, and who demonstrated virtually no interest in politics prior to his engagement with Chartism. Anne Janowitz has argued that the rise of various distinguished poets within later Chartism reflects its internal stratification: "the distillation of the 'Chartist Poets' as individualised figures from out of what had been a collectivised poetic project, enacts both a falling-away from the base of the movement and a corollary division of cultural labour" (*Lyric and Labour* 159). In many ways, Jones's poetry is, as will be seen, reflective of this uncertain relationship between political poet and mass-movement, or between speaker and audience.

It is for this reason that Jones's Chartist poetry, amongst the vast body of Chartist poetry as a whole, makes a useful and interesting object of study, especially in relation to William Morris. It is Jones, after all, whose role within Chartism most closely mirrors Morris's role within the socialist organisations of the 1880s and 1890s: both had backgrounds of privilege (though of different types: Morris's background was essentially bourgeois and financially solid, whereas Jones's was aristocratic but financially unstable), in stark contrast to those for whose liberation they worked; both were relative newcomers to radical politics at the time of their first active political involvement; and both were active poets and writers for a considerable time prior to their political phase, skills which they adapted and re-deployed in the cause of radical political projects. Moreover, like Morris's *Chants for Socialists*, Jones's Chartist poetry served an apparently exhortative, instructive, interventionist purpose, while at the same time displaying an ambiguity regarding the role and position of the individual poet in relation to the political mass-movement, a relation constantly in flux, subject to subtle changes and shifts.

Just as the modern conception of Morris is far from the "settled sentimental Socialist" of Frederick Engels's description ("To Laura Lafargue" 484), so, as I will go on to show, the contemporary critical portrait of Jones is by no means one of an aristocratic interloper or aloof gentleman orator. Brian Maidment has argued that one of the central questions of Chartist poetry is "[h]ow is it possible to imagine a consciousness other than one's own?" (25). Jones in particular – Jones the erstwhile aristocrat amongst a militant working class – grappled with this question in all of its complexity. Indeed, the majority of recent critics looking at Jones and his literary work for the Chartist movement take as their focus precisely this question – the question of his relation to the working-class base of the movement through his use of both an individual and a collective voice in various forms. The "individual voice" here refers specifically to the voice of the individual subject, speaking from a point of isolation as a clearly defined independent agent, conceiving of itself as the singular "I" and of other subjects as "you", that is, inherently external and

sharply distinct from itself, precluding any possibility of its amalgamation with them. The "collective voice", meanwhile, refers to a voice which articulates itself as "we", consisting of a multitude of subjects which coalesce and become one entity or group, which is not then divisible into its constituent parts. Simon Rennie, for example, has argued that Jones's shifting poetic relation to the Chartist movement was part of a conscious strategy to gain and secure a place within it: for Rennie, "Jones's poetry in his early Chartist period appears an attempt, through language, to will into being a relationship with his audience" (77). Roy Vickers, meanwhile, has emphasised the "Christian motifs, rites and language present in Jones's poetry" (60) in order to argue that Jones's image of himself was that of an advocate in the Christian sense, that is, an "intermediary interceding on behalf of humankind to God" (62) who had been called by an overwhelming sense of duty to the task. For Vickers, this religious character allowed Jones to resolve the tension between radical gentleman poet and radical working-class movement by emphasising at once the particularity of the poet as elected advocate of the people and the role of the advocate as tied inextricably to the people being represented (78).

The most influential argument made on this point however, has been Anne Janowitz's assertion that Jones performs a kind of synthesis of the individualist and communal or collective strands of romanticism. This argument arises out of the broader subject of Janowitz's book, which is precisely those twin strands of the romantic tradition and their trajectories throughout the long nineteenth century, from Wordsworth and Thomas Spence to W. J. Linton and William Morris. For Janowitz, romanticism – and romantic poetry in particular – contained "elements of both traditional culture, with its sense of the centrality of a common voice, along with the developmental, self-authorising, autonomous subject of liberalism" (*Lyric and Labour* 30). This "traditional" or communal culture is, for Janowitz, one in which "identities are made through a set of traditions, goals, and social meanings", while in the emergent culture of individualism "the self is pre-given and extremely vulnerable" (16), "[providing] a poetic of the unencumbered self, nourishing liberalism's valuation of the

individual as separate, autonomous in will and reason" (18). Janowitz argues that, in romantic poetry especially, these two cultures are "dialectically engaged" (23). This dialectic is one "in which a deepening interior voice of the individual subject comes to reinhabit the external structure of ballads and customary popular poetics" (24), constituting what Janowitz calls the "double-voice of romanticism" (28). The Chartist poetry of Ernest Jones, for Janowitz, represents precisely this dialectical process – it is "marked … by the double trajectory of romanticism, implying both communitarian identity formation, and that of the voluntaristic self" (165). Further, in Janowitz's assessment Jones's Chartist poetry actually represents an effective synthesis of these parallel traditions: his poetry is that of "the romantic affirmation of the isolated self, whose consciousness is now yoked back to the collectivity in struggle" (180). In other words, as Janowitz has it, Jones managed successfully to draw together the individual and the collective in order to produce a new poetic voice. This new voice was one which articulated to the fullest extent both the associative, collective, communal character of a working-class political mass-movement, and the poetic interiority of Jones himself as a distinct individual member of that mass-movement. As will be seen later in this chapter, Janowitz singles out William Morris as a radical (or in this case specifically socialist) poet who, several decades after Chartism, supposedly managed to articulate a convincing synthesis of the individual and the communitarian in a way which actually progressed *beyond* Jones's achievement, mainly in his *Chants for Socialists*. Importantly, however, Janowitz positions Morris as very much an *inheritor* of Jones's initial achievement in this way, though, as I will go on to argue, Morris is also an inheritor, in some senses, of the politico-poetic confusion and failure to which Jones was prone.

All of the above critical accounts – and especially Janowitz's – attribute a degree of overall success – whether intentional or otherwise – to Jones's Chartist politico-poetic project, and moreover seem to argue that the attainment of this success was relatively seamless and ultimately harmonious. Jones's achievement, which was, to take Janowitz's argument, to create

poetry which "worked with the double trajectory of romanticism to produce … a striking communitarian identity for its time, while drawing upon and making a social sense of the claims of inwardness and the 'deep self' thrown up by romantic individualism" (193), seems, in this account, to apply to the majority of Jones's Chartist poetry. This argument, however – that Jones *did* successfully synthesise the collective and the individual, with only minor aberrations, and that most of his Chartist poetry is reflective of this success – belies the extent to which his poetic relationship with the mass-movement of Chartism was for the most part fraught, wary, unpredictable and confused. As I will go on to show, Jones did indeed manage to finally synthesise the voices of the individual and collective, but this synthesis only occurred very late in his career as a Chartist poet and, crucially, at a point in time where the Chartist movement itself was in decline. Up until this point, the politico-poetic success which Janowitz attributes to Jones is very difficult to identify.

What is observable in Jones's Chartist poetry, then, is not, as critics such as Janowitz would argue, simply an easy progression towards a harmonious resolution, achieved through a graceful synthesis of the individual and the collective, but rather a halting process in which Jones proceeds by fits and starts, veering off in one direction only to turn abruptly round and proceed, falteringly, in another. Jones's poetic voice seems to mutate and migrate, subject to unpredictable fluctuations – fluctuations between the individual, distinct "I" and the collective "we". Further, both the former and the latter are themselves ambiguous and changeable: the former is sometimes the "I" of the member of the crowd and sometimes the "I" of the outside observer or instructor standing at a remove, while the latter can be the "we" of the Chartist among fellow Chartists, or it can be the "we" of the leader addressing a band of followers. Jones is at once hesitant to place himself within the working-class culture of Chartism, and at the same time reluctant to distinguish himself from it. During a time of pressing need – indeed, during the time of Chartism's final chance at concrete political success – Jones struggles to conceive of his proper role as a poet of radical politics. It is in this sense, I will argue, that

Jones is a poet many of whose own poetic expressions of the political are in a strained relationship with the movement he sought to be a part of. He is a Chartist poet out of step with Chartism.

A Voice from Without

At surface level, Jones appears, in his Chartist poetry, to situate his speaker in one of two positions: sometimes, the speaker stands at a remove from the mass-movement itself, observing or addressing it from without, while at other times the speaker's place is within the movement, addressing those outside of it. Such apparently neat distinctions, however, mask a much more complex and erratic poetic stance (as will be seen later in this chapter, an apparently similar stance taken up by Morris in his *Chants for Socialists* likewise disguises important politico-poetic subtleties). In poems such as "Our Summons",[100] "Our Cheer"[101] and "The Blackstone Edge Gathering"[102] (all 1846), for example, Jones employs a poetic voice which is figured as distinct from the main body of Chartists (in spite of the collectivity implied in the "our" of some of the poems' titles) – an ostensibly clear position which is, in fact, anything but.

In "Our Summons", first of all, Jones's speaker takes on an exhortative tone – a technique which he also adopts in other poems such as "The Factory Town" and "A Song for May" (both 1847). The overall purpose of "Our Summons" is to address the working class as a distinct group, first affirming the collective identity of that group before encouraging decisive collective action. Jones accomplishes both the former and the latter tasks by constructing a series of negations and affirmations which, working in opposition to each other, produce the tension which is the driving force of the

[100] Originally published in *The Northern Star*, 16th of May 1846, p. 3. This citation from *An Anthology of Chartist Literature*.
[101] Originally published in *The Northern Star*, 8th of August 1846, p. 3. This citation from *An Anthology of Chartist Literature*.
[102] Originally published in *The Northern Star*, 22nd of August 1846, p. 3. This citation from *An Anthology of Chartist Literature*.

poem. The poem begins with the speaker listing the supposed virtues of the working class, addressing "Men of the honest heart, / Men of the stalwart hand, / Men, willing to obey, / Thence able to command". The following stanza presents a mirror of the first in formal terms, but the images are now of working-class oppression, in stark contrast to the preceding picture of nobility and strength: "Men of the rights withheld, / Slaves of the power abused, / Machines cast to neglect, / When your freshness has been used" (135). By juxtaposing images of proletarian virtue with images of proletarian suffering, Jones creates a productive tension, through which working-class identity can be shored up via a heightened sense of shared injustice. Jones utilises this method of identity-affirmation-via-juxtaposition throughout the poem – near its conclusion, the speaker declares that true Chartists will possess "No changing Norman titles, / To hide your English name, / But the better one of *freemen*, / With its blazoning of fame" (136). Here Jones is deploying the familiar radical concept of the Norman Yoke[103] – the notion that all the forces oppressing the working-class are essentially a continuation of tyrannical Norman invaders who stamped out Saxon independence, and that the real essence of Englishness is to be found in a love of freedom. In this way Jones utilises a kind of radical patriotism, in opposition to a supposedly avaricious and cruel alien ruling elite, to unite the working-class under the banner of shared nationhood.[104]

Jones also uses this method of juxtaposition and contrast to encourage the working class to take decisive political action. The exact nature of that action is not made clear – the purpose of the poem is not to encourage one specific strategy but to bolster the affective resources necessary for whatever action may be forthcoming. So, in the poem's fourth stanza, Jones outlines

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[103] For further information on the notion of the Norman Yoke see Christopher Hill's *The Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* 361-365, as well as James Muldoon's *John Adams and the Constitutional History of the Medieval British Empire* 43-117, and Hugh Jenkins's "Shrugging off the Norman Yoke: Milton's 'History of Britain' and the Levellers".

[104] Scottish, Welsh and Irish Chartists are notably excluded from this problematic formula, in spite of their very significant role within Chartism.

what is to be the ultimate outcome of Chartist political action. He does this by contrasting images of present drudgery in the service of a ruling class with a future of non-alienated labour, or what William Morris would later call useless toil and useful work. "'Tis not to raise a palace," the speaker begins,

> Where Royalty may dwell,
> Nor build for broken hearts,
> The petty parish hell;
>
> 'Tis not to turn the engine,
> 'Tis not the field to till,
> That, for the meed *you* gain,
> Might be a desert still!
>
> 'Tis not to dig the grave,
> Where the dying miner delves,
> 'Tis not to toil for *others*
> But to labour for *yourselves*. (135)

The variety and heterogeneity of working-class labour is first acknowledged and enfolded into one general picture of alienated labour, once again affirming a specific working-class identity based around a broad experience of shared injustice. That shared experience is then placed in contrast with a promised future in which the fruits of labour are not subject to appropriation but remain with the labourer. This productive juxtaposition gives rise to a final exhortation, replete with organic and agricultural imagery: "Up! Labourers in the vineyard! / Prepare ye for your toil! / For the sun shines on the furrows, /And the seed is in the soil" (136).

"Our Summons" is, then, an effective Chartist poem in one sense. Through the emotional power of juxtaposition and contrast, or negation and affirmation, Jones articulates and affirms collective working-class identity (around a variety of poles), before exhorting this coherent force to action. But a particular anomaly in this, one of Jones's first Chartist poems, demonstrates Jones's confused and ambiguous relationship with the Chartist movement at this stage in his career as a Chartist poet. The poem's third stanza – of which the final stanza is a slightly adjusted repetition – contains the lines "Ye labourers in the vineyard, / We call you to your toil!" (135). Of particular interest

is a single word: “We”. This is the only point in the poem in which this particular collective pronoun is used, and so the only point in which Jones demonstrates an intent to utilise a collective voice, rather than an individual one. Throughout the rest of the poem, Jones’s poetic voice evinces no collective or communal character, nor is there any indication that the poem’s speaker is representing a particular movement in any capacity, other than the vague “Our” of its title. Without this single instance of a collective emphasis, the nature of the poetic relationship between Jones’s speaker and the working class in the poem would appear closer to that exhibited by Percy Bysshe Shelley[105] in his poem “The Mask of Anarchy” (1819), in which he famously commands the members of the working class to “Rise like lions after slumber / In unvanquishable number”, reminding them that “Ye are many, they are few” (1131). This Shelleyan voice, which Jones adopts for most of “Our Summons”, is that of the individual poet addressing and exhorting the mass of the working class. Jones’s isolated use of a collective pronoun does, to a degree, complicate this notion of the individual poetic voice addressing the distinct working-class mass, but, in the same instance, does little to progress dialectically beyond it in the way which Janowitz argues for. It is unclear who or what constitutes the “We” within which Jones positions his speaker. It is not explicitly figured as the Chartist movement, and though the poem’s title considered alongside its publication in *The Northern Star*, a Chartist newspaper, might suggest that the Chartist movement is meant, a suggestion is all that it can be. The collective entity in question may be the Chartist executive; it may be the mass-movement as a whole; it may be all those with radical political sympathies; it may even be the oppressed of the earth entire – the precise nature of the group is left effectively ambiguous. In “Our Summons”, then, the position and nature of Jones’s poetic voice is impossible to pin down. It is not individual, but neither is it specifically collective. Moreover, there is no observable synthesis of these two – no

[105] Shelley was a particularly popular poet amongst Chartists, and was a vital part of Chartist literary culture, as well as nineteenth-century radical and socialist culture more generally (Vicinus 96-97; Janowitz, *Lyric and Labour* 135).

incorporation of one into the other – but rather an adoption, for the most part, of the conventional Shelleyan mode with a confused grasp at the vague possibility of a collective voice.

In "Our Cheer", like in "Our Summons", Jones derives poetic force from the power of juxtaposition. In the former, however, there is essentially one overarching binary working throughout the poem, which consists of the imagined figure of the freedom-loving true Briton[106] on one side and the diminished, craven subjugated figure of the modern labourer on the other. Jones then contrasts these two figures in order to admonish the contemporary working class for their supposed cowardice and deference, which is alien to their free-born heritage, the purpose being to shame the oppressed workers into political action. "My countrymen!" asks the poem's speaker, "why languish / Like outcasts of the earth, / And drown in tears of anguish / The glory of your birth? You were a free-born people / And heroes were your race: / The dead, they are our freemen, / The living – our disgrace!". This theme is constantly re-emphasised throughout the poem – there is even what appears to be a reference to the well-known patriotic song *Rule, Britannia*: "He shall not be a Briton / Who dares to be a slave!" – and is intermingled with calls to action in order to right this historical wrong. Jones's speaker commands the workers to "March! When you meet your betters … Undam the tide of freedom! … And

[106] Here, Jones again employs the notion of political conviction as analogous with nationality, only this time the imagined figure representing this idea is expanded slightly to encompass all Britons, rather than the English only. This move suggests the possibility that Jones, in this poem, is using a classical model (Britannia *versus* Rome), rather than a medieval one. Jones effectively abandons the whole notion of political nationhood after "Our Cheer", and, as Margaret A. Loose points out, even goes on to explicitly problematise it, especially in his 1854 novel *The Maid of Warsaw* (a slight modification of a work which he initially published serially in the *Labourer* newspaper from 1847-1848 under the title *The Romance of a People*) (29-30). More broadly, Loose builds on Janowitz's argument as specified earlier by suggesting that Jones's synthesis of the collective and the individual, in liberating the communal from the fetters of nationalism through an emphasis on voluntaristic association, carves out space for the development of a proletarian internationalism, in a formula which "[utilizes] personal volition to eschew inherited nationality, and instead [embraces] membership in the collective identity of the international working class" (22-23).

were it death awaits ye: / Oh! Death is liberty! / Then quails the power that hates ye, / When freemen dare to die" (139). The poem then reaches its climax:

> Back from the church door, craven!
> The great dead sleep beneath,
> And liberty is graven
> On every sculptured wreath.
> For whom shall lips of beauty
> And history's glories be?
> For whom the pledge of friendship?
> For the free! the free! the free! (139-140)

The admonitory tone becomes more emphasised until it takes on an almost aggressive, even denigrating character in a series of rhetorical rejections. At the high point of this humiliation, when the shame of the working-class reader will presumably be at its greatest, the promise of political nationhood is renewed on the condition of radical political action.

The position and role of Jones's poetic voice in "Our Cheer" is less ambiguous than in "Our Summons", but it is by no means less problematic. Here Jones's speaker is *addressing* the working class from a position beyond or outside of it. There are gestures towards the collective, certainly: the poem begins with the salutation "My countrymen!", and, like much Chartist poetry, is explicitly intended to be read by the working class as a collective entity. But contained within the apparently fraternal address of the poem's opening is the constitution of the poet as an individual consciousness – as an "I". The rest of the poem contains no hint of a collective voice. The role, further, which Jones's presiding individual voice is given is that of the guardian and arbiter of political belonging, empowered to revoke said belonging if its terms are violated. There is little sense of reciprocity, nor any room for heterogeneity or dissent – the individual voice is the presiding one, and so Jones's speaker becomes a poetic authoritarian. Jones takes it upon himself to mete out poetic punishment with one hand and extend the prospect of reconciliation with the other. "Our Cheer" is, in this way, an example of one of the "[risks] of Chartist poetry" that Isobel Armstrong identifies, namely that "it could always tip over into didacticism" (195).

"The Blackstone Edge Gathering", finally, represents Jones's adoption of yet another poetic perspective, while still refraining from explicitly identifying with the Chartist mass-movement as a collective. The poem is free from both the ambiguity of "Our Summons" and the hectoring didacticism of "Our Cheer" – instead, its tone is confident, its emphasis celebratory, and its nature essentially descriptive (though in a heightened sense). In this poem, Jones re-imagines the 1846 gathering of Chartists at Blackstone Edge, at which he gave his speech to an audience of 25,000, as the massing of a heroic, noble host, or a holy army (William Morris would later portray a similarly onward-marching proletariat in "The March of the Workers" (1885)). Indeed, "The Blackstone Edge Gathering" appears to be based on a poem by Thomas Campbell (1777-1844) named "On the Battle of Hohenlinden" (1803). Campbell's poem recounts the battle of its title, at which Napoleonic forces inflicted a decisive defeat upon Austrian and Bavarian forces in 1800. The structure and form of Jones's poem exactly mirror those of Campbell's, suggesting Jones's intention to cast the Chartist gathering in a military light. As in the poems above, Jones makes use of a negation at the poem's opening, constructing an image of the familiar drudgery of working-class life: "O'er plains and cities far away, / All lorn and lost the morning lay, / When sunk the sun at break of day, / In smoke of mill and factory". This image is soon banished, as the mighty Chartist army emerges onto the field: "But waved the wind on Blackstone Height / A standard of the broad sunlight, / And sung, that morn, with trumpet might, / A sounding song of Liberty". Specific counties which are Chartist strongholds appear on the scene like massing regiments: "Old *Yorkshire* came, with *Lancashire*, / And all its noblest chivalry". As with Morris and his revolutionary state of being identified in the previous chapter, the Chartist army is not to be a violent fighting force as such, but rather to wield a force which is intellectual and moral. An image of conflict becomes an allegory for the peaceful triumph of the Chartist cause: "So brave a host hath never met, / For truth shall be their bayonet, / Whose bloodless thrusts shall scatter yet / The force of false finality!". Employing his familiar technique of dichotomous contrast once again,

Jones is careful to emphasise that this force is a gathering of the working class *specifically*, neatly articulating the apparently paradoxical injustices of the labouring life: “The men, who give – not those, who take; / The hands, that bless – yet hearts that break; / Those toilers for their foemen’s sake” (140). Indeed, the supposed coherence and strength of Jones’s working class here stands in a kind of ennobling contrast with the fact of its shared degradation: “Though hunger stamped each forehead spare, / And eyes were dim with factory glare, / Loud swelled the nation's battle prayer, / Of—death to class monopoly!”. The Chartist force seems, finally, anointed by God himself – “And up to Heaven the descant ran, / With no cold roof 'twixt God and man” – before the full force of its extravagantly hymned power is turned to focus on the scene at which the poem began, which is the industrial city: “How distant cities quaked to hear, / When rolled from that high hill the cheer, / Of—Hope to slaves! to tyrants fear! / And God and man for liberty!” (141).

The purpose of “The Blackstone Edge Gathering”, then, is relatively clear: the working-class Chartist movement is presented with an ennobled, heroic image of itself and its experiences, the purpose of which is to galvanise it for the purpose of political action. What is interesting in the context of this study, however, is again the nature and position of the voice of the individual poet, or rather, in this case, its absence. There is not, as there is in “Our Summons” or “Our Cheer”, any sense at all of an individual voice addressing an entity distinct from itself. The poetic voice has retreated, serving only a passive, descriptive role. This may well have been deliberate on Jones’s part – unlike with the previous poems, Jones specifies before the poem begins that “The Blackstone Edge Gathering” is to be set to a specific air, which is “The Battle of Hohenlinden” (140), itself a musical arrangement of Campbell’s poem. There were at least two such arrangements by 1846 (Review of “The Battle of Hohenlinden” 116), and these numerous settings to music suggest that “Hohenlinden” was a poem, and later a song, of considerable popular renown. By basing “The Blackstone Edge Gathering” on a popular work, then – and by specifying that the poem might be sung to its tune – Jones

demonstrates his intent for the poem to be absorbed into the realm of popular song. As Timothy Randall has pointed out, songs and chants, very often set to familiar tunes, were a vital part of Chartist culture (173-174) (as they were for virtually any subculture or group – political or otherwise – during the nineteenth century). The relative absence of an individual speaker in "The Blackstone Edge Gathering" makes more sense in light of this – with this absence, Jones maximises the extent to which the poem can be repeated or sung by any individual or group.

What is missing, then, from "The Blackstone Edge Gathering", is a sense of individual interiority, that is, the presence of a specifically articulated consciousness. The position of Jones's speaker as anonymous songster in the poem is certainly not as fraught or confused as those in "Our Summons" or "Our Cheer" – it has a fairly obvious and unproblematic purpose – but any notion of harmonising the individual and the collective is dispensed with, in favour of a conventional popular mode.

A Voice from Within

Much like "The Blackstone Edge Gathering", Jones's "A Chartist Chorus" (1846)[107] blurs the distinction between poem and song. The word "Chorus" in the title is, of course, suggestive of the double nature of the work, which is meant, in part, to be sung, or at least to resemble popular song in its collective, communal nature. The formal characteristics of the poem, furthermore, suggest a desire to make it easily repeatable: it is short, the rhyme scheme is a simple ABAB, and each line alternates between iambic tetrameter and two iambic feet followed by one amphibrachic, creating a thundering and relentless but nonetheless relatively straightforward rhythm. Jones does not, as he does in "The Blackstone Edge Gathering", specify that "A Chartist Chorus" is to be sung to a particular tune, but its song or chant-like character is palpable. In this

[107] Originally published in *The Northern Star*, 6th of June 1846, p. 3. This citation from *An Anthology of Chartist Literature*.

particular work, however, Jones's speaker now uses a voice which is – as it is in other poems such as "Our Destiny", "Our Warning" (both 1846) and "A Song for the People" (1848) – very explicitly that of the Chartist working-class collective.

In "A Chartist Chorus," the poem's driving force is once again that of conflict: each stanza performs a rhetorical contest, in miniature, between two forces. The first half of every stanza, usually the first two lines, constitutes a combative address from the Chartist ranks outwards, to its enemies. The first stanza, for example, begins with "Go! Cotton lords and corn lords, go! / Ye live on loom and acre". From a forceful rhetorical rejection of Chartism's enemies, often addressed straightforwardly as "you" or "ye", each stanza then proceeds to assert Chartist agency through a demonstration of intent. The second half of the first stanza reads "But let be seen—some law between / The giver and the taker". This structure is repeated in all five stanzas of the poem – the final stanza, for example, reads "Our lives are not your sheaves to glean – / Our rights your bales to barter: / Give all their own—from cot to throne, / But ours shall be THE CHARTER!" (136).

What distinguishes "A Chartist Chorus" from the poems examined above is, as I have said, the fact that Jones here speaks as *part of the crowd*. And not only does Jones speak as a Chartist generally, but as a working-class Chartist specifically, declaring that "Despite you all – we'll break your thrall / And have *our land and labour*" (136; emphasis added). This is, essentially, an act of ventriloquising: Jones adopts the voice of the working class – a class whose experience is very much alien to his own – purporting to speak not only for but *as* them, while at the same time failing to incorporate any sense of working-class interiority beyond a very broad and generalised articulation of oppression and exploitation. As a result, the prospect of any kind of synthesis of the collective and the individual once again seems to recede into the distance. In fact, any sort of tangible sense of interiority, working-class or otherwise, is conspicuously absent from this poem. Such ventriloquising at the expense of a sense of working-class interiority is something to which, as will

be seen later in this chapter, William Morris is also prone, as in his poem "No Master" (1884) for example.

In Jones's poem "Onward",[108] the poetic voice is again that of the Chartist collective. Here, the purpose of the poem is, as before, to strengthen Chartist resolve, this time by equating the Chartist political project with the inexorable forces of nature. It is worth noting that "Onward" was published in 1847, at a time of relative retreat for the Chartist movement, when it was wracked by internal divisions (Chase 273-275) over the diversion of its energies into less straightforwardly radical strategies such as the Chartist Land Plan or the contestation of parliamentary elections (275-285). Jones, then, seems to be attempting to reassure the poem's intended Chartist audience of the sure prospect of victory in the face of apparent decline.

The poem begins forcefully, with "Who bids us backward – laggards, stay! / As soon wave back the light of day!". Jones continues to deploy images of natural forces and processes to suggest the unstoppable force of Chartism throughout the poem – the second stanza begins: "Go bid the eagle clip its wing! / Go bid the tempest cease to sing, / And streams to burst, and tides to spring". In the fourth stanza, meanwhile, Jones's speaker challenges the enemies of Chartism to "Go stay the earthquake in the rock, / Go quench the hot volcano's shock, / And fast the foaming cataract lock: / Ye cannot build the walls to hold / A daring heart and spirit bold." Intertwined with these images of unstoppable force are allegorical depictions of the Chartist struggle – the third stanza declares, in another Shelleyan reference, that "Oh! we have battled long and true; / While you were many, we were few, / And stronger chains we've broken through: / Think not *your* paltry silken bands / Can bind Progression's giant hands." In the final stanza, images of natural force give way to quiet, subtler and more drawn-out processes, though these processes prove in the end equally potent, reassuring the Chartist movement that even if political change is not immediately tangible, it is working unseen nonetheless:

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[108] Originally published in *The Labourer*, vol. 11, 1847, p. 1. This citation from *An Anthology of Chartist Literature*.

Forbid the flowery mould to bloom,
Where years have scathed a tyrant's tomb,
And tell us slavery is our doom:
E'en as the peaceful march of time
Moulders the rampart's stony prime,
So calm Progression's steady sway
Shall sap and sweep your power away… (150)

The essential problem with Jones's use of a collective voice here is that it once again fails to incorporate any sense of interiority. This failure is, in this case, particularly due to Jones's relentless abstraction, which serves to obfuscate Chartist political action through an over-reliance on analogy and allegory. As Mike Sanders[109] has observed, such a poetic technique "is unsuited to the task of securing the coherence and cohesion of the Chartist movement either poetically or politically" precisely because it is "unable to resolve the problem of imagining and representing agency except in the most abstract ways" ("Metonymy and Metaphor" 114). This criticism most certainly applies to "Onward": Jones makes use of allegory in order to characterise Chartism in very broad terms as a monolithic "Progression" (150). Jones's relentless use of natural analogies likewise precludes the possibility of any sense of interiority and individual consciousness: Chartists as a group are here denied the privilege of thought or even feeling. Instead, they are figured as powerful but essentially unthinking, their potency deriving from sheer unstoppable physical force rather than any collective strategic capability or personal political conviction. Jones uses a different method to characterise the enemies of Chartism – in this case he employs archaic terms borrowed from an older populist rhetoric[110] – but the effect is the same: contemporary political specificity is erased as the opponents of Chartism become "worn-out nobles,

[109] Sanders has published work on Chartist poetry under the names of both Mike and Michael, and the latter is the name under which this particular article is published. However, to avoid confusion, I am here using the name under which Sanders has published his most recent work, *The Poetry of Chartism*, which is Mike Sanders.

[110] As Gareth Stedman Jones has pointed out, the persistence of such archaic rhetoric – pitting the undifferentiated mass of the "people" against the equally vaguely defined holders of political power – was widespread among both Chartists and radicals in general, having its origins in the populist radicalism of the later eighteenth century (12-13).

priests, and kings". This depiction fails completely to recognise the complex and multifaceted nature of the various groups opposed to the Chartists, which consisted as much of middle-class mill-owners and shopkeepers as clerics and royalty. Essentially, in "Onward" Jones obscures the political reality of Chartist struggle, so that any concrete sense of either shared or individual working-class political experience is ultimately absent, as is any hope of an affirmation of collective identity which might have arisen from such experience.

Even the potentially productive aspect of Jones's use of the collective "we" voice, which is evident in "A Chartist Chorus" for example, is absent in "Onward". In the former poem, the collective voice which Jones adopts at least possesses some political potency in the material world outside the text, in that its song-like form and structure allow for easy repetition in collective and communal contexts. In "Onward", however, such a song-like quality is difficult to observe. The title suggests no such quality, first of all, as it does in, for example, "A Chartist Chorus". Although the entire poem is in the fairly uncomplicated iambic pentameter, every stanza possesses an odd number of lines – five – the rhyme scheme being a slightly awkward (as far as easy repetition is concerned) AAABB. "Onward", then, is distinctly poetic in its form – the song-like quality of "Chartist Chorus", in which Jones's ventriloquising of the collective voice is at least counteracted by the poem's capacity to be absorbed into the corpus of popular songs or chants, is here distinctly absent.

Solitary Confinement

During Jones's imprisonment from 1848 to 1850, he continued to write poems, which he then published shortly after his release in the short-lived newspaper *Notes to the People* (1850-1852). Among other things, these prison poems, written in isolation, demonstrate that Jones was a poet entirely capable of articulating a sense of political interiority and individual consciousness. Indeed,

poems such as Jones's "Prison Fancies" (1851)[111] show that he was most certainly able to engage poetically with the vicissitudes and particularities of the individual involved in political struggle, in spite of the effective absence of any such engagement in his earlier Chartist poetry. In this poem, which was (supposedly) composed while "confined in a solitary cell, on bread and water, without books or writing materials",[112] Jones articulates the emotional and affective experience of political defeat, as well as isolation and imprisonment. The poem begins:

> Troublesome fancies beset me
> Sometimes as I sit in my cell,
> That comrades and friends may forget me,
> And foes may remember too well.
>
> That plans which I thought well digested
> May prove to be bubbles of air;
> And hopes when they come to be tested,
> May turn to the seed of despair. (162)

Jones's poetic gaze is now turned almost entirely inward. Whereas action and strength were the focus of his previous poems, now Jones is concerned with the emotional states of anxiety and uncertainty. These emotional states are, moreover, of a political nature – he fears isolation from the movement and undue persecution, as well as failure and disappointment. Jones, then, is perfectly capable of dealing poetically with the matter of individual experience in a political context. Moreover, he goes on to celebrate individual conviction as the last bastion against total political defeat. Desperate to retain at least this final line of defence, Jones's speaker – who is essentially indistinguishable from himself – begs "Whatever – whatever betide me, / Forbid me to doubt my own heart!" (162). He continues:

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[111] Originally published in *Notes to the People*, vol. 1, 1851, p. 64. This citation from *An Anthology of Chartist Literature*.

[112] Miles Taylor has questioned whether the conditions which Jones endured in prison were quite as harsh as he later claimed. While it is true that he endured a punishment considerably worse than most of his incarcerated radical predecessors, nonetheless there is no evidence to suggest he was subject to any targeted persecution, and indeed the conditions under which he lived were slightly (but only slightly) better than those under which many of his fellow inmates existed (*Romance of Politics* 126-128).

For sickness may wreck a brave spirit,
And time wear the brain to a shade;
And dastardly age disinherit
Creations that manhood has made.

But, God! let me ne'er cease to cherish
The truths I so fondly have held!
Far sooner, at once let me perish,
Ere firmness and courage are quelled.

Tho' my head in the dust may be lying,
And bad men exult o'er my fall,
I shall smile at them—smile at them, dying,
The Right is the Right, after all! (163)

For Jones, in this poem, interiority ultimately triumphs over externality. The greatest conceivable crisis for Jones as a political subject is *not* material annihilation. The conclusive defeat takes place, rather, in the interior realms of the intellect and the emotions. Implicit within this idea is the notion that the kernel of political action is to be found in the realm of the personal and the individual, and that only by beginning with this fundamental element can a political collective be formed. Such a resolutely interior emphasis on individual subjectivity is difficult to find in Jones's earlier Chartist poetry. It begins to appear in "Prison Fancies", as it does in Jones's other prison poems such as "Prison Bars" or "The Silent Cell" (both 1851), but Jones still only applies it to his own consciousness. Jones's role as political poet has once again shifted – his voice is now that of the suffering individual whose gaze is turned inwards, engaged chiefly in articulating his own sense of political interiority. This emphasis, however, is not as yet harmonised with the collective. Jones's prison poetry, as Simon Rennie has pointed out, "offers little evidence of an enhanced engagement with the Chartist body" (91). Where earlier poems either lack both a collective *and* an individual position or clumsily over-emphasise a collective position at the expense of any sense of interiority, so "Prison Fancies" lurches drastically towards the individual subject as the site of political struggle, neglecting the collective in the process.

Successful Synthesis in Jones's Later Chartist Poems

It is in the political poems of his post-prison period that Jones finally synthesises the individual political subject with the working class as a collective. Indeed, in "The Song of the Low" (1852)[113] especially, Jones successfully performs this act of synthesis in a way which, as will be seen later in this chapter, William Morris was ultimately unable to replicate in his *Chants for Socialists*, though Morris approached the problem in a different and perhaps a more complex way. The beginning of this process as far as Jones is concerned can be seen, first of all, in "Hymn for Lammas-Day" (1851),[114] again published in *Notes to the People*. The poem begins in the style of a command or an exhortation, once again designed to sharpen radical resolve: "Sharpen the sickle, the fields are white; / 'Tis the time of the harvest at last. / Reapers be up with the Morning light, / Ere the blush of its youth be past". The metaphor of agricultural work is continued as the speaker asks "Why stand on the highway and lounge at the gate, / With a summer day's work to perform? / If you wait for the hiring 'tis long you may wait – / Till the hour of the night and the storm" (164). There is a subtle shift in Jones's conception of working-class political action here. By using an agricultural metaphor to represent the process of political struggle, Jones articulates that struggle in terms of the realities of working life (albeit for agricultural workers only). This articulation extends into the particulars of that life – the contingency of waged agricultural labour is acknowledged as the speaker talks of waiting for "the hiring", and that experience of hope deferred is then used to symbolise a particular limit to political action that must be overcome, which is the frustration of action by pessimism and hopelessness. In this way, political work and the experience of everyday work are aligned and incorporated into one another, so that the latter becomes enfolded within the former, rather than standing as a sphere apart

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[113] Originally published in *Notes to the People*, vol. 2, March 1852, p. 953. This citation from *An Anthology of Chartist Literature*.

[114] Originally published in *Notes to the People*, vol. 1, 1851, p. 70. This citation from *An Anthology of Chartist Literature*.

from it. This use of a labouring metaphor is, importantly, different from Jones's earlier use of natural metaphors in poems such as "Onward", in that rather than denying a sense of agency to its working-class subjects, it instead fosters that sense. The particular ability to effect political change through concerted action is articulated as a continuation of the expenditure of labour in a general sense, and so Jones constructs an image of a politically active working class which emphasises its members' political capability and potency.

In the next stanza, the particular position – or, rather, positions – of the speaker become important:

> Sharpen the sickle; how proud they stand,
> In the pomp of their golden grain!
> But I'm thinking, ere noon 'neath the sweep of my hand
> How many will lie on the plain.
> Though the ditch be wide, the fence high,
> There's a spirit to carry us over…

The speaker first assumes the familiar exhortative position, only to then leap across to occupy the position of an individual subject. This individual subject is a *labouring* subject – its action is constituted in terms of bodily exertion, in a continuation of the metaphor of agricultural labour which runs through the poem. That labouring subject is, moreover, possessed of a sense of interiority: it is a thinking subject, capable of conceiving of political change in an imaginative sense. Following this, the speaker's position changes again – now it is part of a collective "us" which might accomplish its aims as a group.

The speaker in the poem's third stanza performs similar manoeuvres: again the opening exhortation to "Sharpen the sickle", followed by a move into the articulation of the cruel ironies and particular sufferings of a shared working-class experience:

> …how full the ears!
> While our children are crying for bread;
> And the field has been watered with orphans' tears,
> And enriched with their father's dead.
> And hopes that are buried, and hearts that broke,
> Lie deep in the treasuring sod:
> Then sweep down the grain with a thunderstroke… (165)

There is an emotive aspect to the depiction of proletarian suffering which Jones provides here, and therefore a further recognition of working-class interiority – dashed hopes and broken hearts are just as relevant as material deprivation. Jones, further, uses the collective "we" voice to recount these scenes of deprivation, as he again attempts to bring together personal and shared experience.

Within "Hymn for Lammas-Day", then, are the tentative beginnings of a synthesis of the individual and the collective, as Jones's poetic relationship with the radical working-class as a political movement becomes at once more definite and more nuanced. The overtly didactic impulse has receded, along with the over-emphasis on the collective at the expense of the individual. Likewise absent is the reverse of the latter: an over-emphasis on the individual at the expense of the collective. There is, further, little sense of confusion or ambiguity in the poem. Instead, there is a clear attempt to speak both to and for the working class as a complex whole, rather than to oscillate confusedly between these functions. The poem exhibits at once a sense of individual experience, thought and action, as well as an implication that, in order for their aims to be accomplished, there must be a coalescing of these thinking, experiencing, acting individuals into a collective entity. Jones as an individual poet, meanwhile, does not dissolve entirely into the crowd: he recognises his ability to galvanise and persuade, but this important function of his poetry is prevented from becoming entirely didactic because it is combined with a determined avoidance of stratification. Jones's voice is that of an individual in a grouping of individuals, capable of speaking both within that group and *as* that group.

In "The Song of the Low", Jones can finally be said to have achieved the "poetic of collective lyricism" which Janowitz describes (*Lyric and Labour* 161). There is in this poem a palpable sense of the working class as a particular group, of that group comprising distinct individuals with a range of heterogeneous experiences, and of those individuals themselves possessing a tangible interior life. As suggested by its title, first of all, the notion of the

poem-as-song (or vice versa) returns in “The Song of the Low”, and indeed is far more readily evident than in previous poems. The poem contains a chorus to be repeated after each verse, and its simple rhyme scheme and forceful, rolling rhythm suggest its double purpose as both poem and song. Indeed, an editorial note to the poem in the Kovalev *Anthology* claims that it was actually set to music by composer John Lowry (174). This is a work, then, which is intended for collective recitation. As with other of Jones’s poems of this type, such as those identified above, the collective “we” voice is used throughout “The Song of the Low”. This voice is adopted immediately in the first verse, which becomes the repeated chorus:

> We’re low—we're low—we're very very low,
> As low as low can be;
> The rich are high—for we make them so—
> And a miserable lot are we!
> And a miserable lot are we! are we!
> A miserable lot are we! (174)

If “The Song of the Low” continued in this way, it would be functionally indistinguishable from Jones’s other poems in which he speaks with this communal voice. However, whereas previously Jones uses this collective voice at the expense of any sense of individuality, in “The Song of the Low” it is deployed in order to affirm the working class as one collective entity while at the same time recognising the heterogeneity of working-class experience. In doing so, Jones actually articulates – rather than merely attempts to articulate – both individual proletarian experience and the ways in which that individual experience might come together to represent a unity of interests and aims. The poem’s second stanza, for example, reads:

> We plough and sow—we're so very very low,
> That we delve in the dirty clay,
> Till we bless the plain with the golden grain,
> And the vale with the fragrant hay.
> Our place we know—we're so very low,
> 'Tis down at the landlords' feet:
> We're not too low—the bread to grow,
> But too low the bread to eat.

The fifth stanza, meanwhile follows a similar pattern:

We're low, we're low—we're very very low,
  Yet from our fingers glide
The silken flow—and the robes that glow,
  Round the limbs of the sons of pride.
And what we get—and what we give,
  We know—and we know our share.
We're not too low the cloth to weave—
  But too low the cloth to wear. (175)

Each stanza depicts a different and particular experience of labour, whether on the field, in the factory or, as in other stanzas, down a mineshaft, on a building site or in the field of battle (the latter not an experience of labour *per se* but certainly the experience of many labourers). Jones is here advancing the notion that the working class is far from monolithic, and that the proletarian experience is by no means uniform. Moreover, Jones depicts in these stanzas the particular ironies which characterise these various forms of labour: farm workers cannot afford bread made from the grain they grow, weavers will never wear the garments they create, and so on. Jones is careful to articulate these experiences as, on one level, unique – every working-class individual has their own experience based on their own particular circumstances. As Mike Sanders has observed, "careful attention to class … distinguishes 'The Song of the Low,' creating a poem which aims to build a unified working class out of a range of separate occupational groups" ("Metonymy and Metaphor" 131).

Of course, such attention to heterogeneity is present in many of Jones's Chartist poems. What marks out "The Song of the Low" is the fact that each of the bearers of these particular types of experience has a notable sense of interiority – that is, a sense of an individual consciousness possessing intellectual and affective capacities. In poems such as "Our Summons", workers have the ironies of their exploitation emphasised for them by Jones, rather than articulating those ironies themselves: "'Tis not the field to till, / That, for the meed *you* gain / Might be a desert still!" (135). In "The Song of the Low", however, the voices of the various labouring figures which Jones posits in each stanza – whether miner, farmhand or weaver – are fully aware of, and able to articulate, the unique irony of their own particular form of labour. The individual

labourer is finally allowed to speak in the first person, a position hitherto only granted to the working class as a single massed entity. The poetic voice in "The Song of the Low" is not, then, that of the observer informing the worker of the facts of their oppression, nor is it the undifferentiated collective articulating its general grievances. Instead, Jones's workers each emerge as subjects in their own right, subjects who *know* the facts of their own labouring life and, moreover, possess the means to articulate them in a specific and subjective sense. It is this sense for which Jones is now attempting to act as a conduit and an amplifier.

At the same time as he articulates a sense of working-class interiority in "The Song of the Low", Jones also points towards a fundamental unity of experience, or a collective character, which arises out of the multitudinous varieties of working-class life. This is partly achieved through form: though each experience is different, yet they are all expressed using similar syntax and meter. Builders acknowledge – with ironic humour – that they may be "low", "But at our plastic power, / The mould at the lordling's feet will grow / Into palace and church and tower". In the same way, miners are themselves so "low" that they must descend "To the hell of the deep sunk mines. / But we gather the proudest gems that glow, / When the crown of a despot shines" (175). As well as this, the poem's chorus is, of course, repeated at the end of each verse, tying all the diverse experiences of class exploitation together into one overriding irony. The most important development in this poem, however, is the nature of Jones's poetic voice: the speaker is at once the collective "we", purporting to speak for *all* working-class people, while at the same time articulating specific working-class experiences, momentarily focussing its representational capacities on to the level of the individual before expanding outwards again to encompass the movement as a whole. Specific individual experience is then articulated at the same time as a universal collective experience – indeed, the former is figured as an indispensable part of the latter, and vice versa. It is in this way that Jones, by creating a sense of unity through the yoking together of diverse subjectivities, finally achieves a

synthesis of the individual with the collective. By adapting the form of popular song, and by using that collective form to fully articulate working-class experience in both a particular and in a general sense, Jones affirms working-class identity on several different levels. Still, it takes Jones *as author* to perform that action – Jones, here writing within rather than merely for the working class, is the poetic means by which the diverse strands of a proletarian movement might be brought together in a unified but non-monolithic whole.

Unfortunately, the final part of Jones's poetic achievement – the effective synthesis of an individual voice with a collective one – arose at a time when it was functionally almost useless. As Mike Sanders points out, a "terrible historical irony is, of course, at work [with "The Song of the Low"] … The last poetic flowering of Chartism coincides with the decline of the movement itself" ("Metonymy and Metaphor" 132). Chartism as an organised political movement did indeed go into terminal decline from roughly 1852 onwards. According to Malcolm Chase, after this date "the history of Chartism [was] no more than a multiplicity of small victories" (340). Any kind of politically significant Chartist audience which *might* have been in one way or another receptive to the political potency of Jones's poetry of collective individualism simply *was not present* in the way which it may have been in, for example, 1848. Whereas William Morris published his *Chants for Socialists* during a time of considerable resurgence for the British left, the poetic relationship with the Chartist movement which Jones came to exhibit in his final Chartist poems became a relationship with an entity which was increasingly non-existent, a fact of which Jones would have been only too keenly aware. This is evident especially in the subject of "The Song of the Low". Jones's previous Chartist poems all relate in some way to the Chartist movement specifically – some do so obliquely, such as the "Our" poems – "Our Summons", "Our Cheer" and so on – poems whose titles, alongside the context of their publication in Chartist newspapers like *The Northern Star*, indicate their purpose to speak either for or to the Chartist movement. Others, meanwhile, mention Chartism explicitly, such as "A Chartist Chorus", or "The Factory Town", which ends with the lines

"Remember, that, *to keep the* LAND, / The best way is—*to gain the* CHARTER!" (145). "The Song of the Low", however, is highly general in its terms, referring to the entire entity of the working class in a much broader sense. Jones appears to have quietly abandoned any attempt to relate to Chartism as a distinct working-class political movement.

In spite of his final poetic success, then, Jones was a poet out of step with Chartism itself. During Chartism's more active years, Jones's poetic relationship with the mass-movement was confused and constantly in flux, his poetic position veering between the collective and the individual, between a position within and a position without. Anne Janowitz's argument regarding Jones – that he "[opened] out the group identity to encompass the desiring impulses of interiority" (*Lyric and Labour* 162) – is eventually proved to be correct, but such an act of synthesis comes at a point of severe and irreversible decline for the political movement which was supposed to take on and absorb that new group identity. Indeed, it was not until 1886, when the Socialist League reprinted "The Song of the Low" in a pamphlet entitled *Revolutionary Rhymes and Songs for Socialists*,[115] that Jones's poetry would again align with the purposes of an active radical political movement.

Section II: The Possibility of a Collective Socialist Culture in William Morris's *Chants for Socialists*

As with Chartism, the socialist movement of the late nineteenth century possessed a lively print culture, a large part of which was composed of periodicals and newspapers. Alongside older Chartist material, such periodicals and newspapers published a considerable amount of original work, often drawn from a wide variety of contemporary socialist poets, from the established to the obscure (171). As with the Chartist press, socialist publications were inundated with poetic offerings from their readership (though

[115] This pamphlet was first published, with no specified editors, by T. Binning in 1886.

unlike their Chartist predecessors, socialist newspaper editors were not particularly inclined to publish most of the submissions they received (181-182)). Under Morris the *Commonweal* especially was a patron of socialist poetry: "From 1885 to 1894", Elizabeth Carolyn Miller has noted, "the [*Commonweal*] published 309 poems, 86 percent of which were published between 1885 and 1890, while Morris was editor" (*Slow Print* 195). Indeed, Morris's own *Chants for Socialists* emerged out of precisely this context: just as most of Ernest Jones's Chartist poetry was published in the broadly Chartist-aligned press, so most of Morris's *Chants* were first published in the socialist press.[116] The first of the *Chants* were published in *Justice* (1884-1933), the newspaper of the SDF, while most of the later poems appeared in the pages of the *Commonweal* (1885-1894), the Socialist League newspaper, mostly between 1884 and 1885 (a further three were published in 1887, 1891 and 1894 respectively, of which one – "A Death Song" (1887) – was first published as a pamphlet). As with the Chartist press, moreover, the early socialist press existed alongside a growing popular press, most of which included poetry alongside the bulk of its contents. As Elizabeth Carolyn Miller has pointed out, "Victorian readers … were accustomed to imbibing poetry as news and poetry with news" (*Slow Print* 169). Just like Ernest Jones, then, Morris chose to disseminate his explicitly political poetry via the increasingly popular medium of the newspaper, in an increasingly crowded market, alongside and as part of a larger body of radical (or in Morris's case, usually

[116] Following their publication in the socialist press, Morris's *Chants* were collected in a series of pamphlets, the first of which was published in 1884 (consisting of one poem), the second in 1885 and the third also in 1885 (the latter was reprinted in 1892). Some of the *Chants* were included in Morris's *Poems by the Way* (1896), before being published in full, alongside Morris's long poem *The Pilgrims of Hope*, in 1915. All of the *Chants* appear in the *Collected Works of William Morris* (1910-1915) compiled by May Morris, either in the ninth volume or the twenty-fourth. More recently, the poet Michael Rosen has published a collection of Morris's radical verse entitled *Poems of Protest*, among which are included several of the *Chants*, while in 2015 the musician Darren Hayman released an album of musical adaptations of the *Chants* (with some small changes to the wording of the original poems).

explicitly socialist) poetry.[117] Such a choice was, in essence, an attempt on Morris's behalf to broadcast his *Chants for Socialists* as widely as possible amongst the people for whom they were primarily intended: the radical working class. As will be seen, many of Morris's *Chants* rely for their effectiveness on an implied popular repetition, as well as on the notion of their existence within a wider socialist culture. The medium of the newspaper is, for Morris, the most effective way of facilitating these.

As well as being distributed via popular channels, Morris's *Chants for Socialists* also incorporate certain aspects of a particular popular form: that of song. Just like many of Ernest Jones's Chartist poems, the *Chants* are bound up with nineteenth-century conceptions of the cultural and social value of popular song,[118] both as an already-popular form and as a form which might be uniquely suited to shaping popular attitudes. Socialists themselves certainly made use of song in their own gatherings, often opening and closing meetings with a song (Glasier 2; Miller, *Slow Print* 197), and, like the Chartists before them, they perceived in song a particular political potential. Firstly, as Chris Waters has pointed out, there was a sense in the late nineteenth-century that singing was "relatively immune from intensive commercial exploitation and could be practiced and enjoyed by all". In particular, song was seen as "an important part of a genuinely popular, working-class culture" ("Morris's 'Chants'" 131). In this culture, as Nicholas Salmon has noted, "Everybody sang: they sang in their homes, they sang part songs and glees in groups, they joined choral societies, and they sang in crowds". Socialists, alert to the propaganda value of such a popular cultural form, attempted to plug themselves and their message into working-class culture by using song to

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[117] Unlike such successes as the Chartist *Northern Star*, the socialist press of the late nineteenth century saw mixed results, with rates of circulation often relatively low (Miller, *Slow Print* 41).

[118] As Elizabeth K. Helsinger has demonstrated in her book *Poetry and the Thought of Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, music and song were important not just to radical and socialist poets but to nineteenth-century poets in general. For Helsinger, "[s]ong remains a surprisingly powerful horizon of aspiration for poets throughout the long nineteenth century"(1).

broadcast their message, so that songs became “essential contemporary weapons of propaganda” (“The Communist Poet-Laureate” 31). It should be noted here that Morris’s *Chants* themselves are not specifically and only songs, though a few are set to specific tunes. Rather the *Chants* are, on the whole, poems composed with the intention of collective recital (Waters, “Morris’s ‘Chants’” 128). Many of the *Chants* are, however, *song-like*, in their use of forceful rhythms and simplistic rhyme schemes.

As well as in the above sense, song had another particular value to late nineteenth-century socialists. As Chris Waters has demonstrated, in the nineteenth century music in general was seen to possess a significant didactic function in the shaping of popular morals and taste. Influenced by the theories of the High Church theologian Hugh Haweis, many Victorians “assumed that music could exert a refining influence in society, elevating the passions and paving the way for social harmony” (*British Socialists* 98). This was a theory popular amongst middle-class reformers, who proceeded to establish numerous choirs, orchestras and entertainment societies for working people (99-100). But socialists too read Haweis, and many of them became “enamoured of the idea of using music to assist in the moral reform of the individual” (101). This belief took a variety of forms in action, among which were the imposition upon workers of a supposedly authentically working-class corpus of old English folk songs (105), as well as the encouragement of workers to make their own music. In Morris’s case, as will be seen, the goal was to write and then disseminate amongst the workers poems of a distinctly song-like nature – song being the most appropriate musical form in this case – which forcefully espoused the socialist cause, in order both to win that class to the cause of socialism and to fortify it in the subsequent struggle for victory. Workers, repeating the songs created for them, were essentially to sing themselves socialist. This was a project which, according to Waters, possessed something of a didactic quality: “the purpose of the Socialist League … was ‘to make more socialists,’ and this entailed *a process of*

conversion in which music, given the nineteenth-century emphasis on its social utility, could play an important role" ("Morris 'Chants'" 132; emphasis added).

Like Ernest Jones, then, Morris relied on the radical (or in Morris's case specifically socialist) press for the dissemination of his *Chants*. And, again like Jones, Morris, as will be seen, attempted to work a musical dimension into many of his *Chants* as part of a broader mission to foster working-class solidarity and adherence to the socialist cause. The parallels between Jones and Morris do not end here, however – revealingly, critical assessments of Morris's *Chants for Socialists* often bear a remarkable similarity to that of Jones's Chartist poetry.

Morris and Jones

In the final chapter of her book *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*, Anne Janowitz – whose argument regarding Ernest Jones I have engaged with in the previous section of this chapter – extends her critical gaze to William Morris. Janowitz considers Morris's *Chants for Socialists* to be very much in the vein of Chartist poetry, referring to them as "Chartist-styled" (197), and indeed Jones represents for Janowitz "a crucial fabric out of which Morris worked as the poet of … *Chants for Socialists*" (195). Specifically, Janowitz sees Morris's work as a continuation of Jones's politico-poetic project, namely the formulation of a poetic voice which fuses the voluntaristic potentiality of the individual with the massed force of the collective, which Janowitz summarises as Jones's "complex project of social subjectivity" (217). For Janowitz, Morris's socialist poetry "acknowledges and aims to make sense of the contest of individual and communitarian identity formation" (216-217). Ultimately, Janowitz argues, Morris was, like Jones, broadly successful in this poetic endeavour: at his most successful – in this case in his poem "The Voice of Toil" (1884) – Morris "creates a collective subjectivity in Jones's vein" (224). Indeed, for Janowitz Morris should ultimately be looked upon as *improving* Jones's formula: "Morris was … more poetically self-confident than Ernest

Jones. So it was easier for him to acknowledge his relation to the romantic tradition, and to work both within and against it … to knit together a poetic which responded to the claims of both inner self and social teleology" (217).

Again as with Jones, most critics seem broadly to agree with Janowitz's argument concerning Morris's *Chants*. There is something of a critical consensus surrounding these works – perhaps the least studied of his political literature – which asserts that he was essentially successful in the creation of a poetic mode that fully articulated the voice of the socialist collective. This consensus is far from new: in the early twentieth century, John Bruce Glasier wrote admiringly that "[the *Chants*'] equalitarianism is superb. They speak as *of* the people, not as *to* or *in behalf* of the people" (5). More recently, Chris Waters, while sceptical about a latent didactic impulse within socialist musical culture in a broader sense, has nonetheless argued that "by making use of the first person plural [Morris] tried to voice the aspirations of the people." For Waters, Morris used this device "with some success, generating a sense of common purpose and shared identity" ("Morris's 'Chants'" 141). Other critics more fully echo Janowitz's particular argument, which refers specifically to a *combination* of the individual and the collective. Veronica Alfano, for example, has argued that Morris's "*Chants* … imitate the unified voice of the masses. Many replace the singular 'I' with a universalising 'we' … their speakers' depersonalized nature is directly linked to their socialist message, permitting Morris to balance individual authorship with textual communitarianism" (247). Elizabeth K. Helsinger, meanwhile, has argued that the rhythmical qualities of the *Chants* mean that they can "set the self *in ordered motion with others* – can carry us across the boundaries of individual consciousness to create a third entity, as yet not fully imaginable" (157).

In light of the reassessment of Jones in the previous section of this chapter, however, such endorsements of Morris's supposed success require revisiting. They are not uniformly wrong, of course: as I will go on to show, Morris *did*, at times, articulate a profound sense of collectivity and communality in his *Chants*. Indeed, he did so in a different and perhaps a more potent way

than Jones: where Jones, in his Chartist poetry, simply sought to amalgamate the individual and the collective voice, Morris, in certain of his *Chants*, attempts to cultivate a new poetic mode in which the two can coexist without the dissolution of either. In these instances, Morris does not merely posit a new collective *voice* but instead articulates, through poetry, a thoroughly collective *context* in which Morris as individual socialist poet can situate himself. This poetic context is reflective of the socialist culture which, as will be seen, Morris was attempting to bring into being with the *Chants* – it emphasises the importance of relations between members of a collective in the very constitution of that collective, while at the same time granting autonomy to readers and audiences through invitation and questioning rather than command and admonition. Vitally, it avoids stratification: Morris does not attempt to disavow his own poetic voice, but rather to implement it into a context of fellowship in a thoroughly egalitarian way. At times, the voice Morris uses in his *Chants* is quite simply that of socialist speaking unto socialist, or, even more broadly, fellow unto fellow. Morris as poet perceives himself as possessing a particular role within socialist organisation, but this role does not necessarily distinguish him from any other socialist whose speciality may lie elsewhere. Like a storyteller by a fireside, Morris can, at times, address and draw together his fellows, all the while avoiding the occupation of a place *above* them. He speaks *with* them, rather than down to or for them. In this way the voices of the individual and the collective in Morris's *Chants* do not blend together – rather, they interlock, working in co-operation with one another. Morris is taking Ernest Jones's aims, as well as his methods, and actually *developing* them in an attempt to achieve something greater and more truly egalitarian.

Unfortunately, however, Morris in the *Chants* is, like Jones in his Chartist poetry, inconsistent. He does not uniformly sustain the realisation of his politico-poetic project. Very often, in fact, Morris succumbs to the same tendency which ultimately limited Jones's Chartist poetry: the assumption of a didactic role (though in a subtler sense than Jones). This tendency is

manifested in two interrelated ways: the obfuscation of working-class experience through abstraction or over-generalisation and the ventriloquising of the working-class itself. In the latter, to be more specific, Morris either portrays or assumes the voice of a supposedly ideal revolutionary worker in a move which, rather than facilitating working-class self-expression, in fact precludes that class from entering into the kind of non-stratified, comradely and collective social relations which Morris elsewhere attempts to bring into being amongst socialists, effectively silencing or at least obscuring the figure of the workers themselves. The members of the working class are, in these instances, still to be instructed or educated (sometimes, as will be seen, through the affective power of musicality) rather than joined with or related to. If Morris does indeed fuse the voluntaristic potentiality of the individual with the massed force of the collective in *Chants for Socialists*, then that sense of individual potentiality is not always extended to workers themselves.

Morris's *Chants* are, then, very much in the tradition of Ernest Jones's Chartist poetry. Though he may not have been conscious of Jones as a direct poetic predecessor, Morris nonetheless both incorporates and builds upon Jones's efforts to amalgamate and draw together the individual and the collective, holding the two elements in balance without dissolving one into the other. At the same time, Morris's failures in the *Chants* closely mirror Jones's failures in his Chartist poetry. Indeed, it is precisely in these instances of compromise and failure that Morris's socialist poetry is at its most Jonesean, succumbing as it does to the same limitations of didacticism, ventriloquising and condescension.

The Constitution of a Collective

As I have said above, Morris's *Chants* are, at points, representative of a move away from a Jonesean attempt to articulate a voice which synthesises the collective and the individual, and towards the creation of an implicit collective context in which the voice of the individual poet can speak both for itself and

as part of the socialist collective. This poetic project of Morris's is reflective of a wider late nineteenth-century socialist project, which was the bringing about of a culture of personal liberation and collective association not just in the coming future but in the socialist movement of the contemporary moment. As Anna Vaninskaya has argued:

> The freestanding, atomised individuals who composed [the Victorian socialist community] came together by choice; they were not born into a traditional community already held together by ties of kinship or custom. All such associations were in essence mere contractual groups, rational and instrumental organisations. But this did not prevent some of them from viewing themselves as self-fulfilling fellowships based on common mores (and even a 'religion' of a sort) and familial-style co-operation. Their purpose was the recreation of a collectivity characterised by many of the features of a small-scale organic community, but having the … self-consciousness only afforded by modern civil society. (*The Idea of Community* 137-138)

Morris's attempts in the *Chants* to posit a non-hierarchical culture of individual collectivity should be seen as part and parcel of precisely the project which is set out above. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller has pointed out that Morris was not alone amongst socialist poets in this endeavour, arguing that for socialists, "the political value of [poetry] was in its capacity to draw together readers of the radical press into an alternative culture" (*Slow Print* 168). This alternative culture was to constitute "a live, collective public" (170). In other words, Morris was embarking on a socialist poetic project which was not simply trying to insert itself into an existing culture – as Ernest Jones was doing with his Chartist poetry – but to draw individuals into a new one.

The particular value of Morris's efforts in the *Chants* (where they are successful) is the emphasis which they put on the question of interpersonal relations in the constitution of a collective, and especially the ways in which Morris articulates an answer to this question through the working out of his own role as socialist poet. "The Day is Coming" (1884),[119] for example, appears at first to be a poem more or less in the Jonesean vein, seeking to

[119] Originally published in *Justice*, 29 March 1884. This citation from *The Collected Works of William Morris*.

encourage action and resolve through evocations of a coming liberation, alongside affirmations of collective power and calls to action. Much of this is achieved, furthermore, in a style reminiscent of Jones – the play of opposites, in this case question and answer. The poem's ninth stanza, for example, could almost be a direct quotation from a Jones poem: "O strange new wonderful justice! But for whom shall we gather the gain? / For ourselves and for each of our fellows, and no hand shall labour in vain" (180). Likewise, the poem's seventeenth stanza – which reads "Why, then, and for what are we waiting? there are three words to speak / WE WILL IT…" – could almost be an example of Jones's work for the Chartist movement. The twenty-second stanza merits a similar observation: "It is we must answer and hasten, and open wide the door / For the rich man's hurrying terror, and the slow-foot hope of the poor" (181).

This poetic call to action is written mostly in the first-person plural, suggesting the possibility that, as in certain of Jones's poems, Morris is essentially employing a collective voice in order to speak for the mass of socialists without necessarily incorporating any sense of interiority into that voice. But there is more going on here – "The Day is Coming" begins and ends with an act of *invitation*. The poem begins: "Come hither, lads, and hearken, for a tale there is to tell". This act of poetic drawing-together – implying a group of fellows on equal terms with the speaker who are invited to gather round him and listen to his "tale" – is committed very explicitly by an *individual*, who implores his audience to "laugh not, but listen to this strange tale of *mine*", and later tells them that "*I* tell you this for a wonder" (180; emphasis added). Morris establishes at the opening of the poem a relationship with his audience which places him, as speaker, firmly *within* a gathered group of like-minded comrades. This relationship chimes with Morris's own view of the role and position of the poet in general: as Anne Janowitz has noted, "The focus on the poet as a special type of person was anathema to Morris. He argued that poets should take up their part in the general burden of work" (*Lyric and Labour* 227). The speaker does not disavow his position as individual poet, but this position

neither elevates him above nor excludes him from the collective. Such an implied position of individual participation in a gathered collective then enables the speaker to transition during the remainder of the poem from the individual "I" voice to the collective "we" voice without awkwardness, as it is understood that the speaker can constitute both at once. This is not an act of synthesis or amalgamation, as it is with Jones, but rather a harmonisation of two separate elements – the speaker is understood by the reader to be at once the distinct individual and the participant in the collective life of the group. The poem ends, finally, on a similar note to that on which it began. An invitation to act, which is given impetus through repetition of the word "come" at the beginning of the last four stanzas, is extended: "Ah! Come, cast off all fooling, for this, at least, we know: that the Dawn and the Day is coming, and forth the Banners go" (181). In contrast with, for example, Jones's "Up! Labourers in the vineyard! / Prepare ye for your toil!" ("Our Summons" 136), there is here no attempt to command or instruct. Instead, there is the extended hand of the comrade-in-arms entreating the reader to join the collective. The speaker who extends that hand is understood to be a constituent part of – rather than leader of or mouthpiece for – that collective.

"All for the Cause" (1884)[120] operates in a similar way to "The Day is Coming". Most of the poem is concerned with the articulation of a kind of non-specific radical martyrology, which Morris attempts to connect in a very immediate sense with the socialist movement of the late nineteenth century. Speaking of those who have "gone before", Morris tells the reader that "E'en the tidings we are telling was the tale they had to tell, / E'en the hope that our hearts cherish, was the hope for which they fell". Morris then turns this legacy to the present socialist struggle, declaring that "Voice and vision yet they give us, making strong our hands for strife" (185). But as with "The Day is Coming", the speaker's position in "All for the Cause" implies something more profound. The poem begins with an invitation to "Hear a word" – like the "Hwæt" of the

[120] Originally published in *Justice*, 19 April 1884. This citation from *The Collected Works of William Morris*.

narrator of the Old English poem *Beowulf* (1) (of which Morris published his own translation), who issues a call to gather round and pay attention to the coming recitation, Morris attempts to replicate the immediacy and communal character of an oral culture in a written work. This opening act of invitation works in a similar way to that of "The Day is Coming", in that it implies a context in which the poem's speaker symbolically gathers up a collective audience, inviting them to participate in the life of the group through an act of shared listening without removing himself from that group. And as with "The Day is Coming", the speaker in "All for the Cause" is shown to be an individual speaker: "Oft meseemeth", he ruminates, "in the days that yet shall be, / When no slave of gold abideth 'twixt the breadth of sea to sea" (185). Again, further, the speaker as individual can also speak as part of the group without monopolising its voice, switching seamlessly and convincingly from "I" to "we": "We who once were fools defeated, then shall be the brave and wise" (186). Here, Morris is not addressing himself downwards to an unthinking mass but attempting to speak to his listeners as in a dialogue of equals, the entry into which, it is implied, is voluntary.

Morris's attempt to cultivate, through his *Chants*, a non-stratified socialist culture of comradely collectivity is perhaps made most explicit in "Down Among the Dead Men" (1885).[121] The entire poem is essentially an extended toast rendered in poetic form, the purpose of which is to draw together and then affirm a collective socialist culture which is, at its core, voluntary, taking as its central pillar certain unifying values and aims. The poem begins with the familiar invitation to gather round: "Come, comrades, come, your glasses clink; / Up with your hands a health to drink". As before, Morris is here attempting to establish a certain type of relationship with his socialist audience, drawing them in without coercion to a fellowship of equals, of which Morris as poet is only one constituent part – a comrade amongst "comrades". Each stanza then begins in a similar manner, with Morris inviting

[121] Initially published in *Chants for Socialists* [#3] in 1885, this citation from *The Collected Works of William Morris*.

his imagined fellows to join him in the social ritual of shared drinking: “Well done! now drink another toast, / And pledge the gath’ring of the host”; “Now comrades, let the glass blush red, / Drink we the unforgotten dead”; “The Day? Ah, friends, late grows the night; / Drink to the glimmering spark of light” (412), and so on. Morris employs an exaggerated conviviality in these lines, emphasising the importance of interpersonal relations – relations of empathy, solidarity and co-operation between gathered individuals – in the constitution of any collective body.

Like Jones, Morris in “Down Among the Dead Men” is concerned with articulating the shared characteristics around which his political collective will gather. Jones, in his poem “Our Destiny” for example, speaking for the Chartist mass in rejecting oppression, writes, “No! no! we cry united by our suffering’s mighty length” (137). Morris likewise memorialises the long history of working-class experience – though with a focus on working-class struggle rather than suffering, something which hints at Morris’s broader commitment to socialist autonomy in this poem – declaring: “Drink we the unforgotten dead / Who did their deeds and went away” (412). Just as, in his poem “The Factory Town”, Jones declares a revolutionary intent (albeit a rhetorical one) on behalf of the organised and united working class – “Then up, in one united band, / Both farming slave and factory-martyr!” (145) – so Morris proposes a toast to “The people armed in brain and hand, / To claim their rights in every land” (412). Unlike Jones, however, Morris once again incorporates into these affirmations a recognition of the essential autonomy of the individual as a constitutive element of the collective. At the end of every stanza is the refrain “And he that will this health deny, / Down among the dead men, down among the dead men, / Down, down, down, down, / Down among the dead men let him lie!” (412). Any prospective member of the socialist collective is presented with the opportunity to exercise their autonomy – they may either join in the toast, as they are initially invited to do, and confirm their membership of the group, or they may deny it and exclude themselves from that group. The choice, it must be acknowledged, is presented in a slightly coercive way – if

the reader chooses to deny the cause of socialism then they are to be consigned, rhetorically, to the realm of the "dead men". This does not, of course, mean that the obstinate refuser is to be actually killed for dissenting, but rather that by disavowing the cause of socialism they commit themselves to a death-like existence – one of lifelessness, inertia and oblivion – a kind of death in life. In spite of these coercive overtones, however, a vital emphasis on the voluntary is the overriding characteristic here: the prospective socialist is not simply to be taken up and borne away by the political current. In certain other of the *Chants*, socialists are figured as mere objects of political change, the grand sweep of which pulls the chosen individual along irrespective of personal volition. An example of this can be seen in "All for the Cause", when Morris declares that "Fair flies life amid the struggle, and *the Cause for each shall choose*" (186; emphasis added). In "Down Among the Dead Men", however, the embrace of socialist values and aims which entails membership of the socialist fellowship is presented as a *voluntary choice*, in which the individual maintains an essential sovereignty over their own actions. The consequences of making the wrong choice may, in Morris's conception, be dire, but the onus is nonetheless on the subject themselves to act, rather than to be acted upon.

"No Master" (1884),[122] considerably shorter than most of the *Chants*, is different from the poems examined above in that it is explicitly supposed to be sung. In this instance, the tune specified is "The Hardy Norseman's Home of Yore", a "well known [refrain]" according to Nicholas Salmon ("The Communist Poet-Laureate" 35). Morris is here, then, very palpably anticipating communal recitation, a fact which has important consequences for the poem's content. It begins, in a similar way to the poems specified above, by implying a collective context of interrelated individuals: "Saith man to man, We've heard and known". The rest of the poem then proceeds to articulate – supposedly in the voice of the socialist collective – socialist goals and aspirations: "…we no

[122] Initially published in *Justice*, 7 June 1884. This citation from *The Collected Works of William Morris*.

master need / To live upon this earth, our own, / In fair and manly deed"; "We few against the world / Awake, arise! the hope we bear / Against the curse is hurled". Though, as I will go on to show in a subsequent part of this section, "No Master" is not as uniformly successful in its articulation of the place of Morris as poet in a non-hierarchical collective of freely related individuals as some of the poems I have analysed above, nonetheless its song-like qualities – suggesting mass recitation – gesture towards a certain kind of musical community-creation. The second stanza, for example, takes the form of a question accompanied by a defiant answer: "And we, shall we too, crouch and quail, / Ashamed, afraid of strife, / And lest our lives untimely fail / Embrace the Death in Life? / Nay, cry aloud, and have no fear". Considered in the context of group singing, these lines have a new resonance: each singer addresses the question to every other singer, all of whom collectively make up the "we" of the poem, each then answering that same question in reply to every other member of the collective. Rather than simple self-reflection, which might have been the case if the poem were not so obviously to be sung by a group, "No Master" encourages the enactment of a kind of interpersonal dialogue *en masse*, in which every singer is both questioner and responder, challenger and challenged. A complex web of communication comes into being almost instantaneously as each speaks to each in an act of collective affirmation of belief and purpose. The third stanza of the poem operates in the same way:

> It grows and grows--are we the same,
> The feeble band, the few?
> Or what are these with eyes aflame,
> And hands to deal and do?
> This is the host that bears the word,
> No MASTER HIGH OR LOW –
> A lightning flame, a shearing sword,
> A storm to overthrow. (409)

The poem's first line of "*Saith man to man*, we've heard and known" (emphasis added) has a greater significance in light of this: Morris in "No Master", anticipating communal recitation, is attempting to facilitate a real-time constitution of the socialist community of individuals by actually encouraging

the enactment of the social relations necessary for its existence through collective song. Every participant in the group is, in a sense, an individual speaker, while nonetheless representing only a single element in a larger network of relations.

Morris's Failures in the *Chants*

Though, as I have demonstrated above, Morris was at times an effective poet of collectivity, nonetheless, like Jones, his poetic claims to speak on behalf of the socialist movement – albeit only as an individual member of the socialist collective – are flawed in two significant ways. Both of Morris's flaws were also Jones's – the unresolved problem of incorporating a sense of specific working-class experience and interiority (i.e. the experience and interiority of the individuals who are, together, supposed to constitute the greater part of the socialist collective) into the poetry of the communal, and the ever-present possibility of a descent into didacticism.

Chris Waters, in his article "Morris's 'Chants' and the Problems of Socialist Culture", has argued that Morris placed a definite "emphasis on the importance of concrete struggles of real people" (141). Although this is true in a sense – Morris did indeed attempt to articulate working-class struggles and experiences in most of his *Chants*[123] – nonetheless the highly general and even irrelevant terms in which those struggles and experiences are sometimes articulated often renders them obscure or unclear. As I have argued, this is an issue which occurs in much of Ernest Jones's poetry, although he finally manages to resolve it in "The Song of the Low". Morris, however, never quite manages such a resolution. "The Day is Coming", for example, is a poem which, as I have argued above, articulates in many ways a genuine sense of socialist collectivity. At one particular point in the poem, however, the nature

[123] In his book *British Socialists and the Problems of Popular Culture*, Chris Waters points out that very few songs of the late nineteenth-century socialist movement actually contained any references to the experience of labour itself (119).

of exploitative capitalist labour relations is rendered in archaic agricultural terms, terms which are, of course, essentially irrelevant to the predominantly urban industrial proletariat with which Morris and his fellow Marxists were mostly concerned. Predicting the character of the socialist future, Morris makes a negative reference to capitalist labour: "For that which the worker winneth shall then be his indeed, / Nor shall half be reaped for nothing by him that sowed no seed". At other times, meanwhile, the issue of obfuscation is manifested in a distinct tendency towards over-generalisation: in "The Day is Coming", once again, the unpredictability and precarity of working-class existence is articulated simply as "…fear / For to-morrow's lack of earning and the hunger-wolf anear", while the nature of capitalist wage relations is boiled down to the ability of one person to "buy his friend in the market, and pinch and pine the sold" (180). Likewise in "No Master", the entirety of working-class experience and history is quite simply "The grief of slaves long passed away" (409). In "The Voice of Toil" (1884),[124] furthermore, the workers' "iron master" forces them to "grind treasure and fashion pleasure / For other hopes and other lives", while the workers themselves live in a world "Where home is a hovel and dull we grovel, / Forgetting that the world is fair" (177). And in "The March of the Workers" (1885),[125] further still, the working class are not factory workers (who might produce anything from matchboxes to steel), dockers, miners, cooks, petty clerks, costermongers, navvies or maids-of-all-work but rather simply "they who build thy houses, weave thy raiment, win thy wheat, / Smooth the rugged, fill the barren, turn the bitter into sweet" (410). Of course, in this last instance Morris does at least gesture towards the diversity of working-class experience, just as Ernest Jones does in "The Song of the Low", but whereas Jones enfolds within his articulation of the heterogeneity of proletarian life a highly perceptive and relatively specific recognition of working-class interiority on the level of the individual labourer, Morris's focus

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[124] Initially published in *Justice*, 5 April 1884. This citation from *The Collected Works of William Morris*.
[125] Initially published in *Commonweal*, February 1885. This citation from *The Collected Works of William Morris*.

in these instances remains predominantly on mere superficial *types* of labour. These types are, moreover, rendered in terms which are highly general, to the point where any sense of the *working* life of a nineteenth-century working-class person, and the specific subjectivity which might accompany such a life, is difficult to grasp. Common to all the above examples is, essentially, the articulation of the multifaceted and nuanced working-class experiences of poverty and wage labour in terms which are unsuitably broad.

It is possible, of course, that Morris in these examples is attempting to generalise in a productive sense – to avoid specificity and so encompass as broad a range of working-class experience as possible in order to appeal to the maximum number of potential socialists. Whether a deliberate tactic or not, however, these "banal generalisations", as Nicholas Salmon terms them ("The Communist Poet-Laureate" 37), concentrate too much on the amalgamation of working-class experience and not enough on such experience at the level of the individual, flattening out any sense of specificity and maintaining a sense of the working class as a single massed entity only.[126] This has ramifications for Anne Janowitz's claim that Morris "[makes] sense of the contest of *individual and communitarian* identity formation" (*Lyric and Labour* 216-217; emphasis added) in his political poetry. Although, as I have argued above, Morris is in other poems than those mentioned above – and even within the same poems – able to produce a real and palpable sense of multiple individuals coming together on equal terms to form a harmonious socialist collective in the way that Janowitz suggests, nonetheless Morris's failure, in the above instances, to articulate individual working-class experience in a specific and nuanced way – in spite of the fact that members of that class are supposed to constitute the main element of the socialist collective in question – means that such a sense of a harmonious collective of equals is by no means sustained in the *Chants*. The vital element of the individual, which is supposed

[126] This is, of course, in spite of the considerable time Morris himself spent amongst working-class people, observing the nature of their everyday lives, especially in the East End of London. For more on this subject see Rosemary Taylor's article "'The City of Dreadful Delight': William Morris in the East End of London."

to interact with the communitarian in this formula, is, then, distinctly limited, precisely because it fails to encompass the individual and particular subjectivity of members of the working class.

This issue of the obfuscation of working-class experience feeds into a greater problem with Morris's *Chants*, which is an occasional tendency towards didacticism – a problem which, as we have seen, also manifests itself in much of Ernest Jones's Chartist poetry. Such a problem may, in fact, stem at least in part from the overall mission of organisations like the Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League as Morris understood them, which was, as I have noted in the previous chapter, the making of socialists. By this, of course, is meant the channelling of working-class anger and force – through education, agitation and organisation – into the proper channels, as socialists saw them, so that the revolutionary potentiality of the working class is not wasted (Vaninskaya, *The Idea of Community* 168-177; Skelly 37). Such aims are, in fact, stated quite explicitly in one of Morris's *Chants*: "Yea, the voiceless wrath of the wretched, and their unlearned discontent, / We must give it voice and wisdom till the waiting-tide be spent" ("The Day is Coming" 181). At times in the *Chants*, as I have shown above, these aims manifest themselves in ways which in fact manage to *avoid* didacticism, but at other times – especially in those *Chants* which are set to music – a distinctly didactic tendency threatens to overwhelm Morris's project of socialist culture-creation.

In one sense, as I have shown, "No Master" is precisely one of those *Chants* which tends towards the creation of a socialist culture of equal relations, in this case by facilitating the enactment of a kind of collective dialogue. At the same time, however, the poem contains within it an attempt to impose upon its audience, through a form of ventriloquising, a picture of the idealised revolutionary subject. Such an imposition implicitly attempts to shape and manipulate the beliefs and values of potential socialists, rather than simply to articulate a culture in which such beliefs and values are the product of mutual consent, voluntary association and non-hierarchical dialogue. In "No Master", as we have seen, Morris attempts to take on the voice of the socialist

collective by beginning with “Saith man to man”. The following lines then purport to voice the aspirations and beliefs of socialists in a highly generalised sense: “…we no master need / To live upon this earth, our own, / In fair and manly deed”; “cry aloud, and have no fear, / We few against the world; / Awake, arise! the hope we bear / Against the curse is hurled”. The problem here, however, is a very Jonesean one: the attempt to speak for the socialist collective as a whole becomes unconvincing. This is because, as I have argued above, there is virtually no attempt to incorporate within the collective any real sense of working-class subjectivity or interiority on an individual level, in spite of the fact that free and comradely association of working-class individuals is supposed, in theory, to constitute the force of the socialist project. Elsewhere, as we have seen, Morris is quite capable of articulating his *own* role of individual poet, as well as the place of that role within the socialist collective, and indeed he articulates precisely these things elsewhere in “No Master”. When it comes to the working class as individual subjects within the collective, however, there is virtually no attempt to articulate any kind of interiority nor any curiosity as to what might constitute an authentic and empathetically rendered working-class perspective. Morris’s supposedly proletarian voice in “No Master” effectively excludes any sense of a convincing working-class point of view at the level of the individual, while at the same time purporting to be the voice of *all* socialists in a very broad sense – “man” speaking to “man”, in a formula which appears to incorporate all classes (though not all genders). Morris then makes use of this falsely inclusive voice to impose upon the working-class reader, singer (in the sense of those who are themselves actually ‘singing’ the poem) or audience an idealised version of themselves – one which is resolutely fearless, totally committed to action and absolutely assured of eventual victory, proclaiming proudly to the world the guiding principle of “No MASTER HIGH OR LOW” (409). Morris is here constructing a kind of perfect revolutionary figure in whom the working class are supposed to see something to *aspire to*, rather than their own selves reflected. The musical dimension of this poem, of course, reinforces this

strategy. The later nineteenth-century view of music – as articulated by Waters – as a tool which might be used to shape and improve working-class character suggests that the working-class subject who is hearing or singing "No Master" is supposed to unquestioningly absorb and take on, through the emotive and affective power of song, the characteristics imparted to the false vision of itself which Morris constructs. Morris then begins to appear like the socialist "cultural missionaries" of Waters's description, who "became like the philanthropists whom they disliked, trying to impose their own desires" on the working class (*British Socialists* 128).

In "The March of the Workers" a similar problem occurs, as it does in other poems such as "May Day" (1891)[127] and "A Death Song". In the former poem, set to the well-known marching tune "John Brown's Body" (Salmon, "The Communist Poet-Laureate" 35), Morris narrates the gathering strength of the massed working class, which – as in Ernest Jones's "The Blackstone Edge Gathering" – is figured as the onward march of a dauntless army. This army, first of all, is very specifically comprised of *workers* in a far more explicit sense than in Jones's poem, as evidenced by the poem's title. For most of the poem, Morris describes this proletarian force from the position of an observer, reporting on its progress for an imagined reader – the workers of the world are "they" rather than "we", "them" rather than "us": "Forth they come from grief and torment; on they wend toward health and mirth". Every third stanza takes the form of a kind of repeated chorus, which reads "Hark the rolling of the thunder! / Lo the sun! and lo thereunder / Riseth wrath, and hope, and wonder, / And the host comes marching on" (410). As with "No Master", there is in all these lines a distinct lack of any sense of working-class subjectivity – workers are rendered as a potent force, charged with energy but nonetheless appearing as a single massed entity which exists apart from Morris as individual poet. Indeed, Morris's position as observer in the poem serves only to exacerbate this problem and make it explicit, whereas in "No Master" it is

[127] Initially published in *Justice*, 4 May 1891. This citation from *The Collected Works of William Morris*.

mostly implicit. Morris's marching workers, observed with delight from a removed position, can be enthusiastically portrayed, and they certainly possess affective capacities (in a collective sense), but nonetheless they cannot speak of or for themselves. This sense of the working class as a great mass separate from the poet himself, to be directed or marshalled from above in some sense, is further compounded by the poem's musical qualities – unlike "No Master", it is set to what is very specifically a *marching* tune. Marching tunes are, of course, designed to bring together individual bodies into an ordered and regulated unit, subordinating the person to the group under the direction of the tune itself. The poem's form as well as its content, then, carries with it the suggestion of a group ordered from above, acting with a single mind and purpose, as opposed to a gathering-together of distinct individuals able to direct themselves.

At a certain point in "The March of the Workers", Morris almost appears to grant the hitherto silent mass of workers a tangible sense of subjectivity. Towards the end of the poem, Morris purports to actually channel the voice of the assembled workers. The act, however, is unconvincing: "…with words the sound is rife: / 'Once for you and death we laboured; changed henceforward is the strife. / We are men, and we shall battle for the world of men and life; / And our host is marching on.'" The experience of labour under nineteenth-century capitalism is rendered in – once again – highly generalised terms as "[labouring]" for "you [i.e. capitalists] and death", while the struggle for working-class liberation becomes, similarly, "strife" or "battle". Again, working-class experience is flattened out into a series of clichés, with any sense of personhood or a distinct proletarian consciousness remaining vanishingly small. And again, therefore, what appears as a heartening portrayal of working-class strength and experience is in fact a subtle act of didacticism. Morris constructs an image of the ideal revolutionary worker – filled with "wrath", "hope" and "wonder", declaring proudly "On we march then, we the workers, and the rumour that ye hear / Is the blended sound of battle and deliv'rance drawing near" (411) – which is supposed to act *as an example* to

its audience rather than to incorporate that audience into the poem as an equal subject. Morris's ideal worker is full of revolutionary ardour and steely determination, but beyond these outward characteristics appears to have been effectively hollowed out, bereft of substance, conjured up to serve as a mere vessel for the communication of a political message.

Just as with Ernest Jones, then, Morris's apparent success in the creation of a new poetic voice for the socialist movement – i.e. one which balances the individual with the collective – is not as universal as it might at first appear. There are points in the *Chants* at which Morris abandons any goal which he may have had of the creation of a socialist culture of non-stratified, comradely relations, instead taking up a role which Jones often rehearsed – that of teacher or self-appointed guide, addressing the working-class from a position outside of it, unable to incorporate the existence of that class as a collection of individuals into his poetic voice except through the falsehoods of ventriloquising and appropriation. But this failure is only partially characteristic of the *Chants* as a whole. In many ways, certain of the *Chants* in fact progress *beyond* Jones's attempts to simply amalgamate the voice of the poet and the voice of the radical group. Instead, they conceive of a socialist collective which is comprised, by its very nature, of freely associating and thoroughly equal individuals, for whom the formation of a group necessitates a process of dialogue and interrelation, rather than a dissolution into a larger whole. The socialist movement does not speak with one unified voice in these examples, and nor is it desirable that it should. Morris's vision is instead of an entirely new culture, one which stresses the specific importance of socialist *relations* as a fundamental factor in the creation of a sense of socialist collectivity, and which sees those relations manifesting themselves in non-hierarchical forms of interpersonal communication. It is this culture – a culture which contains multitudes – which Morris attempts to actually enact, albeit inconsistently, through his socialist poetry. Morris as poet, furthermore, fits easily and convincingly into this form of socialist community – he has a special function to perform, certainly, but that function does not elevate him above those who

might have different functions to perform for the socialist movement. In those of the *Chants* which express this sense to its fullest extent, therefore, the real potential of Morris's socialist poetics is realised.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Morris is only a single element – albeit a significant one – in the vast network of writers, poets, activists, polemicists, politicians, philosophers and journalists which makes up late-Victorian socialism. Likewise, Cobbett, Owen and Jones are all only individual figures caught up in the various radical currents and movements of the early-to-mid nineteenth century. Nonetheless, each of the earlier writers in question represents a certain point from which a continuum can be established, which, ranging across the intermingling radical, proto-socialist and socialist cultures of the nineteenth century as a whole, reaches ultimately to Morris. Certain modes of thought or methods of writing articulated by Cobbett, Owen and Jones in the earlier part of the nineteenth century reappear decades later in Morris's work, though they are, of course, always significantly altered during passage. Reading Morris as a part of such continuums not only facilitates the making of new intellectual and political connections within nineteenth-century political culture as a whole – mapping the fate of early radical ideas as they are transmitted across the nineteenth century – it also provides the means with which to consider various aspects of Morris's own writing and thought from different perspectives, and with renewed attention.

The possibility then arises of making other connections and establishing other continuities between and across the nineteenth-century radical and socialist movements. Rather than taking a simple genealogical approach, tracing superficial similarities in terms of doctrine or morality, critics might read, in a much closer and more attentive sense, the works of a multitude of figures associated with late-Victorian socialism alongside any number of early radical figures. These two cultures are by no means isolated from one another – rather, the earlier feeds through numerous and diverse channels into the later, with the nature of each changed, for the reader, in the light of the other. Attentive readings of the two interlinked yet distinct traditions would thus allow critics to observe with greater clarity – or to uncover for the first time – particular

intellectual, political or literary strands which emerge in the beginning of the nineteenth century and mutate during its course.

Vitally, the political culture which begins with such figures as Cobbett, Owen and Jones, and which emerges in an altered form at the end of the nineteenth century via its contact with Morris, is, in many ways, a *living* culture still, and the study of that culture has, therefore, a particular contemporary relevance. During the twentieth century William Morris inspired not only legions of socialists, artists, architects and city planners but also – in spite of his hostility towards parliamentarianism – numerous political heavyweights within the British Labour Party, from Clement Attlee (MacCarthy 587), to Barbara Castle (xvii), to – somewhat puzzlingly – Tony Blair (Stirling 139). His example, as well as that of earlier radical figures, continues with renewed relevance in the Labour Party of the twenty-first century. Though, for good or ill, Jeremy Corbyn is no longer leader of the Party, nonetheless his four years of leadership have had a profound impact – as James Butler has written in a recent piece for the *London Review of Books*, "[t]he [Labour] party has been reanimated, its policies and outlook now decidedly socialist; the left is a substantial force again rather than a vestige" (14). Both a representative of and catalyst for that left-wing surge, Corbyn himself has referred publicly to William Morris on more than one occasion. At the close of a speech to the Durham Miners' Gala in 2018, for example, he repeated lines from Morris's "The March of the Workers". Speaking at an event during the election of 2019, meanwhile, Corbyn claimed that "[o]ne of the great [people] that founded our movement was the wonderful socialist William Morris … William Morris was a very dedicated, very serious socialist, who wrote wonderful books and wonderful poetry, and organised people in the latter part of the nineteenth century." This is not the only instance of Corbyn's public invocation of the specific forms of nineteenth-century radical and socialist culture specified above – in his address to the Labour Party conference in 2018, Corbyn quoted lines from Ernest Jones's "The Song of the Low". In a campaign video made during a visit to New Lanark, meanwhile, Corbyn praised Robert Owen, declaring that "[t]he

original dream [of Owen] is what we, the Labour Party, want now", and in a speech given to the Cooperative Party Conference in 2017 Corbyn stated that "[o]ur movement was in its early days inspired by the actions of William Morris and Robert Owen." Unlike with Morris, Jones and Owen, Corbyn has not publicly mentioned William Cobbett by name, but in 2013 he did sign an early day motion in Parliament, sponsored by his close political ally John McDonnell, which noted Cobbett's 250th birthday and declared that "he was a tireless campaigner against corruption and exploitation of the underprivileged and fought hard for parliamentary and social reform."

The political culture of the nineteenth-century left is, then, still a distinct presence within the left of the twenty-first century, and has been recognised by one of its most prominent parliamentary figureheads (thus far) as both the foundation of that movement and an example to it in the present day. But it takes more than one person – even if that person was until recently leading the Labour Party – to keep a tradition alive. The extent to which the emerging generation of journalists, writers, organisers, activists and indeed politicians associated with the British left will themselves absorb and adapt the legacies of their socialist, proto-socialist and radical predecessors, as Morris did over a century before them, remains to be seen.

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